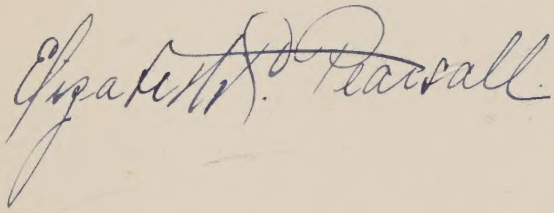
The HAVEN

EDEN PHILLPOTTS

1909



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THE HAVEN

THE HAVEN

BY

EDEN PHILLPOTTS

Author of

"The Three Brothers," "Children of the Mist," etc.

NEW YORK

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MCMIX

This One



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TO

THE LADY CHURSTON

WITH VERY SINCERE REGARD

BOOK I

CHAPTER I

WITHIN the unfinished breakwater, where it stretched —waiting for some strong man to wake goodwill between State and people, and so complete it—there floated half a hundred fishing ketches at their moorings. The 'Jack and Lydia,' a fine dandy-rigged trawler of fifty tons, rode among them; but while the other vessels were mostly manned and about to sail, this one showed no sign of human life or activity. Her canvas was down and stowed. All was snug aboard. Only a row of gulls sat along her trawl beam, stretched their wings over their claws, preened their neck feathers, and chattered among themselves.

A little square of black cloth shivered half-mast high on the 'Jack and Lydia'; and men in other ships marked the mourning flag and expressed regret at the cause as they passed her. The 'True Vine' and the 'Silver Spray,' the 'Gratitude,' the 'Alpha,' and the 'Ocean's Gift' cast off moorings and slipped away under their ochre-coloured sails to sea. The 'Try It,' the 'Pilgrim,' the 'May Queen,' the 'Provider' followed; and from the inner harbour came dinghy after dinghy with the crews of other trawlers. But none visited the 'Jack and Lydia.' Dandies and cutters trimmed sail and departed on the tide, until a long line of boats in vanishing perspective stretched from Brixham to Berry Head, from the Head to a grey horizon; but the sea fowls still made toilet and enjoyed seclusion on the boat with a mourning flag.

And, elsewhere, those two, who had linked lives in the past and given their joint names to this vessel, were parting for all time, and Jack stood beside his Lydia's dust.

The churchyard sloped southerly in steps up a green hill, with every step a grave; a grey stucco-faced tower arose in the midst of the burying-place, and over the porch there flashed out red stone battlements that brightened the drab of the building. From this entrance to the pit was not many yards, and now a stream of people, following a brightly polished coffin—like a black caterpillar with a yellow head—left the church, reached an open grave and curled round it.

John Major and his son and daughter, Edward and Lydia, stood first, nigh the clergyman. Behind them came a drooping black smudge, with her face hidden in a handkerchief. This was Emma Michelmore, the widowed sister of Mr. Major. A dozen relations and the hands of the 'Jack and Lydia' completed the funeral party; but many came uninvited, because Mrs. Major had been approved and esteemed as a kindly, large-hearted spirit, ever ready to befriend others less prosperous than herself.

William Gilberd, and Arthur and Harry Michelmore made up John Major's crew. The first and second were men; the third, a boy. All wore black and all displayed a genuine sorrow. The master showed less emotion than they. After his wife's funeral was ended, and he had looked his last upon her coffin lid, he went apart and stood quietly with his hands in his pockets until the people were gone. Then he came back and talked with two men who filled the grave. He moved a number of little wreaths and crosses out of the way until the mound was made and the red earth slapped into shape. Then he set the tributes of spring blossoms upon it in order of their importance. Some exotic flowers puzzled him. There was no card attached to them, but he placed the wreath with the rest.

Mr. Major was fifty-three years old—a square, sailor-like man, with hair in small grey curls, and a face stern of expression, clean-shaved, and underhung. His jaw belied him, for he was not a hard

spirit. Scarred and tanned as the mainsail of a trawler; and disfigured by a cicatrix where his cheek-bone was once laid bare by a breaking rope, his countenance was yet distinguished by nature of its eyes. They were hazel-hued, bright, sanguine—the home of large faith. Trust, adamant and unshakable, belonged to John Major as a constituent of character. He sprang from a long line of Christian fishermen, and rejoiced that such men had been among the first friends of his Lord. He was cradled in the tradition of a watching Saviour; his life stood thereon; it survived all strain and left him serene, even here and now before the master-sorrow of his days. He had been married twenty years and got three children. One son was dead, and there remained to him his daughter, Lydia, seventeen years old, and his boy, Edward, just turned of fourteen.

Mr. Major was one of the 'Quay Lords' of Brixham, the most famous and the largest fishing village in Devonshire. A division of the manor into quarters took place during ancient time, and at a subsequent period, that portion which descended to the family of the Gilberts passed by purchase into the hands of twelve fishermen. Their shares have been divided and subdivided times without count since then; and so it comes about that the village under Berry Head, within the sheltering, western arm of Torbay, numbers more lords and ladies of the manor than any other town in England.

In addition to his little portion of land, John Major owned his own vessel, and no mortgage, pawn, or plight stood between him and possession. He worked hard, was counted prosperous, and admitted to be a fisherman fully equipped in the knowledge of all grounds. The greater part of his life passed in his vessel, and he slept better afloat than ashore. His nickname was 'Holy John,' but this title none ever used as a term of offence. The people felt the adjective to be just, and used it accordingly.

At Mr. Major's direction the funeral party dis-

persed and left him alone. His sister, Emma Michelmore, walked away beside her nephews, Arthur and Harry Michelmore, and the mate of the 'Jack and Lydia,' William Gilberd, accompanied them; while in the front of the group went Lydia Major with one Mrs. Honeywill—an old friend of the dead. Behind them followed Nicholas Honeywill, of Berry Farm. His little daughter, Deborah, and Edward Major, came with him. This boy and girl were very fast friends, and now, each with a hand in Mr. Honeywill's, they wept—he for grief and she for sympathy.

Emma Michelmore also shed tears, but, like the south wind, it was her nature so to do. She magnified the troubles that fell upon her, and forgot the benefits. She loved best to retrace the past, and, by judicious suppression of lights and heightening of shadows, she succeeded always in displaying a very dark picture. She displayed it now for the benefit of Mr. Gilberd.

"We buried four, and then I buried my husband, who fell off the pier-head owing to darkness, though evil tongues said drink; and then there was Uncle Stooks went mad, so we buried him; and then there was poor young Bolder, tokened to sister Sarah—he was throwed out of one of Hancock's swinging-boats to Brixham regatta ten years ago, and broke his neck; so we buried him—and nobody else ever offered for Sarah. And now my brother's wife be gone, and I ax: Who next?"

"You might say death dogs the family, like the gulls after the boats when we be gutting fish," admitted Mr. Gilberd; "but there 'tis—sooner or later, 'tis all one—death will have the last breath, like a woman will have the last word, so I always tell my missis."

"Why wasn't Mrs. Gilberd to the burying?" asked Emma, with moist voice and watery eyes. The historic widow's cruse of oil had been but a mild wonder to this widow's cruse of tears.

"She sat up all night with my youngest. Her's

got the whooping cough, and doctor says if we don't watch her terrible close she'll slip through our fingers. But, I say, she's got a fighting heart a'ready, though but a year old. When the Gilberds come in the world, they come to stay—and she's come to stay; and when she coughs she clenches her fist and goes pretty well black in the face, and doubles up her li'l carcase like a woodlouse. But round she comes again. 'Tis a fine sight to see her."

Mr. Gilberd's flat face and pale eyes grinned at the spectacle of his infant's fight for life. He was a dirty man, and, being of fair complexion, could not conceal the fact. An odour of the ugly things of his calling hung about him. To pass him was to be reminded of the heaps and waste places beyond the city gates.

"You may be in the churchyard again afore you think to be," said Mrs. Michelmore; "ban't one babe in twenty catching the whoops so young ever gets over 'em."

"I'm like your brother John," answered Mr. Gilberd. "Jack Major have the faith that moves mountains. Mr. Munday said that very word, and a truer never was said. And I've got a very fair dollop of faith too—though not so much as him. My faith goes under afore a head wind and a head tide; and so would the faith of shining angels if they went trawling; but Jack Major—'tis all in the day's work to him. Lord never made such a wonder afore. Whether he's afloat or ashore, or carrying away a net and gear, or running afore foul weather, or making a record catch, or burying his wife—'tis all one: whatever happens be right to happen. And nothing will ever make him think otherwise."

"That's him," she admitted. "He challenges the Almighty, as I often tell him. 'If you won't smart under life, as you're meant to, the Lord will go on till you *do* smart, John'—that's my word to him. 'Tis like a schoolboy pretending he don't feel the rod—a fool's trick; for the schoolmaster only lays it on the harder. The wise boy be like the wise dog—

he hollers so soon as the whip comes out of the corner; and he gets off with a lighter dose in consequence; but Michelmores and Majors be always roughly handled, and so 'twill ever be so long as any of 'em are left."

Elsewhere the wife of Nicholas Honeywill spoke to Lydia Major, and reminded her of the new significance of life, and the new duties now awaiting her.

"You must try and take her place, so far as a daughter may. You knew her ways, and you must show yourself worthy of such a good mother and born cook as she was."

Lydia nodded.

"So I will then—if Aunt Emma will let me."

The girl was dark and good-looking. The shadow of her father's underhung jaw belonged to her, but only just enough to show a likeness to him. Her nature was resolute, courageous, and passionate. She loved her father dearly, but she loved another man better. Mr. Major's simple philosophy puzzled her. Young though she was, Lydia could mark injustice and cruelty at the corner of every tortuous street of her home. She smarted at many things and doubted much. She was clever, and had once hoped to become a schoolmistress; but love had made a secret dawn for her of late, and her previous ambitions to teach were now perished. She had sucked somewhat from the spirit of the hour—a fact that made her father sad.

Ned Major, the boy, awoke another sort of anxiety in his parent. John's son was destined for the sea, and the time had come that he should go to it. But, as yet, Ned had not displayed that spirit vital to success afloat or ashore. The 'fighting heart,' that Mr. Gilberd applauded, by no means appeared in him. The small sea-dogs in harbour—his peers, who panted for the day that would find them off with the boats—called him a landlubber, and flung dead fish at him. He loved the shore, and longed for a farmer's life; but it was not to be. Already the cry of the

deep had sounded for Ned, and the darkness of his destiny was only hidden for the moment by this greater darkness of his mother's death. Warp and woof he had been hers. Her strength and her weakness belonged to him. He was gentle and tender-hearted, and not very brave in a boat. He could trust the crags and the trees, and climb after sea-gulls' eggs on Berry Head, where even the fisher-boys hesitated to follow; but the sea, albeit it environed his life and home—the sea, though his infant eyes had opened upon it, and the shout and murmur of it were the earliest sounds to be stamped into his ears—was no friend to him.

He loved his father's patch of land; but he hated his father's boat. His heart was with the plough and the horse that tugged it; but the trawl that ploughed the sea bottom and the vessel that tugged it—these were things that woke no joy in Ned. He feared the sea and he loathed all death, though he knew that the greater mortality of good fish, the happier must be his home.

He was fair, well knit and physically strong. Some shadow of imagination belonged to him through his mother. She had found leisure for reading rhymes, and sucked a sort of dim, sentimental pleasure from them; he read no rhymes; but he read a girl's eyes, and here, at fourteen, in the shadow of puberty, already felt his heart quicken and his eyes mist at the voice of one little maid.

Mr. Honeywill talked to him now as they went along. Then they reached the bereaved home of John Major, and the farmer stood at the threshold and still talked.

"Life's chiefly occupied in making the best of a bad job, if you're wise; and in making bad worse, if you're a fool," he said. "But you're not a fool, Edward, as I know very well, and so you'll make the best of it, as becomes a brave boy and the son of your father. You'll make the best of your dear mother's going, and know 'tis best for her and, loving

her, feel 'tis best for you too. And you'll make the best of going to sea, and larn how to be your father's right hand, and larn how to trust the ocean same as he does. I speak as a landsman and a farmer who wouldn't trust it, deep or shallow, myself; but you come of seafaring stock, generation after generation, so 'tis fitting for you."

"I be going to try and do my duty, Mr. Honeywill," snuffled the boy.

"And who can try and do more? And please to tell your father, when he gets back, as I'll come down over to-night and smoke a pipe with the poor man, if he's equal to it."

Nicholas Honeywill, his wife, and his little daughter went their way; Emma Michelmore, with Lydia and Ned, stood before the door of her brother's dwelling.

Mrs. Michelmore looked about her and displayed a liquid indignation.

"All the blinds up again, I see—all round! A wicked pretence of sorrow—a mockery, I call it. Not one decent soul among the lot—and her scarce covered in her grave."

"You couldn't ask them to keep in the dark till evening," said Lydia Major.

"No," answered her aunt, "I couldn't, and I shouldn't have; but manners is manners, and no proper-mannered woman would have lifted an inch o' blind afore ours had gone up."

"I'll go in, then, and pull them up," answered her niece.

"Do it, and let the sun in."

Ned said nothing, but at his young heart was a thought that even the great sun's self, shining again upon his mother's couch, and finding it empty, would miss her a little.

CHAPTER II

JOHN MAJOR'S house stood on the main road from Brixham to the promontory of Berry Head. Here, lifted a hundred feet above the haven, a bird's-eye view of it, stretched beneath his dwelling, might be seen. In plan like the wards of a key, the harbour lay with wharves thrust into the midst and running round about. Here rose a harmony of yellow masts and medley of rich tones upon them. Cordage and nets and sails slung to dry, ascended above the boats; the tide was in and the craft floated bulwark to bulwark closely packed, on the still, grey-green water. Opposite the terrace, whence Mr. Major's house looked down, there rose Overgang—a network of steep, winding steps that ran amid small homes. The houses ascended tier upon tier; while beneath, along the quay, stretched a row of small shops and inns and spread the red roof of the auction mart. To seaward, beneath the hill, there ran the first great landing-place of the harbour and extended the rialto of the fishermen—a pier, upon the inner side of which berthed the boats, or any chance vessels whose business brought them here; while along the outer wall there passed a raised foot-walk protected from the east by a parapet breast-high. This parapet had been polished by the elbows of generations of fishermen.

Without there stretched the haven and danced the waters of Torbay; within, extended the harbour, and prospered the life of it.

Upon Brixham quay a marble statue stands, supported by two cannon. Its hand is on its breast and its back is turned toward the sea. This unconscious

jest in stone has a face half parrot and half fish. It stares fatuously from heavy-lidded eyes at the opposite house-front; and it purports to be William, Prince of Orange, who landed here at a nation's call to fill an empty throne.

The unlovely houses with shining roofs climb round about. Mostly grey they are—grey and leaden under their slates; yet sometimes break out buff and russet faces to brighten the house rows; sometimes a glitter of sign-writing or flapping fold of flag vary the monotonous terraces. A feather of steam often floats above the railway station perched as a crown to Overgang; a red-roofed church towers among the grey roofs westward; and behind the village, valleys open into a world of pleasant coombs and denes that fade to the forest-clad hills beyond them. Here now, dimly through a haze of morning light, there glimmered the first glory of wakening larches; there bulked the darkness of fir woods; there stretched many a rounded slope of good red fallow to the skyline.

With his eyes upon these familiar objects, John Major left his home on the morning after the funeral and went his way to the harbour. He was starting on a fortnight's cruise 'round land,' for there had come tidings of heavy catches in the North Channel. Certain fishing grounds—extending from Lundy to the Irish coast—had been under a cloud, and a time of depression from which John Major and his neighbours suffered, was attributed to the fact that the North Channel had so long proved barren. Pessimists declared those seas were fished out, even as the famous Dogger Bank is sometimes trawled in vain; but now good news of heavy nets in the old waters was sending all Brixham's larger craft round the Land's End once more, and Mr. Major prepared to depart with the rest. Behind him, along the quay, came his son, Ned, and the boy, Harry Michelmore. They carried the skipper's little tin box, for John was particular and liked clean clothes when long from

home. Lydia followed also, and the brother and sister presently saw their father and his crew afloat. Mr. Gilberd, Arthur Michelmore, Harry, and the captain put off to their vessel together; and in half an hour the 'Jack and Lydia' was away and off on her long cruise. She sailed fast and Mr. Major knew that long before Lundy was sighted she would overhaul many a sister boat that had set out before her.

Lydia saw the little black flag pulled down and the great mainsail drawn up.

"Next time you'll have to go too, Ned," she remarked to her brother.

"No need to remind me of that," he answered.

"But 'tis settled that Harry takes one more cruise along with father, to show you your work and to help you."

"So he should."

Lydia's eyes were about the quay and she looked not seldom at a cutter-rigged trawler lying in the harbour with a wet net drawn up to the main-mast head. It glistened in the morning light, and here and there a scrap of weed shone from it. The boat was empty and the crew ashore.

"The 'Night Hawk,'" she said. "Mr. Brokenshire's vessel."

Ned nodded and replied:

"Sam Brokenshire always fishes by night, so 'tis a very good name for his ship."

They returned homeward by way of the market, and Lydia ventured to ask a salesman what Mr. Brokenshire had done.

The man was young and cheerful. He winked at her, and took out a pocket-book.

"I sold 'em, so I can tell you just what you want to know, Miss Major. Here you are—a nice lot of plaice—quite out of the common—and some other first-class fish—five pound three shilling. What luck some people have—eh?"

The young salesman winked again and turned to his labours, where a catch of hake awaited him,

stretched grim, staring-eyed, and grey upon the stone altar of auction.

"Come up to Berry Head, Lyddy," said her brother. "There's nothing to do for the minute—ban't eight o'clock yet. 'Tis all so lonely and wretched to home. Do 'e come along, and us'll gather a few cowslips down in the cliffs. I know where they grow to. And we'll take 'em to the grave. Do come. You'm fond enough of walking there alone."

She reflected.

"'Twill be something to take us out of reach of Aunt Emma for a bit. She'll be glad to be rid of us. She's going over all your sea clothes this morning."

His face fell.

"I know it. I'm to try 'em on to-night."

He sighed deeply, and his sister pitied him.

"'Tis hard that you have to go for a fisherman, hating it like you do. A pity for some things that father won't let you work on shore; but, then, what's to be done with the boat? 'Tis all that he'll have to leave you, because I'm to have the land."

"Don't keep on about it," repeated her brother. "'Tis all right and proper. It have got to be. I don't grumble, but I can't help hating it, all the same. And I shall hate it always—the sea, I mean —though I shan't bide on it always."

"I'll come up on the Head for a bit, if you like," declared Lydia. "We'll see the boat out of sight, and pick a few cowslips, if you know where to find them."

They returned home, told their aunt that they would be back again before noon, and then departed together. Ned declared that he knew a haunt of flowers in the cliffs, and would take his sister to see it.

As they went Lydia talked of time to come, and the boy listened. The world was very dark for him at this season, and he wondered how Lydia could face the future with such courage and confidence.

"How 'tis that you ban't feeling so low as me,

I can't understand," he said. "But I suppose it is because poor mother was more to me than you."

"She liked you best," answered Lydia. "But I loved her well enough, Ned, and I'm sad enough, though I may not make so much fuss as others. To see Aunt Emma would dry anybody's tears. Look at father—he don't weep, yet who can feel what he feels?"

The boy argued from his fourteen years, and seemed more childish than usual to the girl. She had much to support her that he knew not of. The future for her, love-lighted, dawned as brightly as his glowered dark before him. She considered now, while they advanced among the slopes of the cliffs, whether she should reveal her secrets. Then she remembered that he who shared them had commanded her for the present to tell none.

"There's the 'Jack and Lydia,'" she said. "That's Mr. Mogg's boat, just astern of father. I know her by the slice of white in the foresail. It hasn't been barked yet."

Ned regarded the vanishing fishers without interest. His spirits were at their lowest ebb.

"I reckon I shan't find no cowslips," he declared. "Somebody's been down here and gathered 'em."

"Nonsense," she answered. "You know very well nobody's been down there. There aren't a dozen boys in Brixham brave enough to go down."

He cheered a little at this praise, flung off his coat, and made a descent over a great shelf of limestone, where scanty hold offered for hands and toes. His sister watched him, and marked how the exertion and difficulty woke his spirit to cheerfulness. The return was easier, and anon Ned shinned up to the top of the cliff through a chink among the rocks not far distant. In his mouth he bore five cowslips.

"Mother always had the first," he said. "And now she'll have no more. And I wouldn't have minded much if I'd slipped and broke my neck, Lydia, for now she's gone——"

"Don't you say those foolish things. And for that matter she shall have the flowers. And like enough she'll be near enough to see them too. We'll put them on her dear grave this afternoon."

They sat for an hour upon the forehead of a southern-facing precipice, and saw the trawlers fade away westward. Lydia kept her eyes on the sea; Ned lay upon his stomach, supported his face on his hands, mournfully chewed young clover, and stared inland. Speech ceased between them. Presently they rose and went home together.

Where ploughed land sloped to the cliff edge and stretched out in rich meadows, sung over by the lark, a solitary house appeared. Here stood the farm of Nicholas Honeywill, blinking with deep windows to the sea, and snugly set in its proper thicket of old giant laurels. A grove of elms, wind-blown, and thickened now with carmine inflorescence, rose about it, and the farmyard extended beneath them.

"Would you like to go up to Berry Farm and ask Mrs. Honeywill for a drink of cider and see Deborah?" ventured Ned's sister as she helped him into his jacket.

But he shook his head.

"No, I won't go there no more—only makes me feel wicked to see Tommy messing about with the things[1] and doing the work that I'd like for to do. I wish to God as he'd been father's boy and I'd been farmer's."

"Maybe you won't wish any such wish some day," answered Lydia, thinking of little Deborah Honeywill.

"Yes, I shall, then. I heard Deb's father say a bit agone that the sea weren't no use except for sea-weed; and that's the truth. I've hated it and hated the sight of it ever since I comed into the world, and 'tis a cruel hard thing as I've got to go on to it, and 'tis cruel of father to force me."

He relapsed again after this outburst, and his

[1] *Things*—cattle, sheep, or swine.

sister, not used to seeing the boy so cast down, made further attempts to hearten him. She could not share his aversion from the sea; indeed, of late her spirit was often there, and chiefly at the time when other maidens slept. Not seldom a fearful joy kept Lydia waking, and after midnight, or before the dawn, she looked out of her window at the few glow-worms of fire in the harbour below, and pictured a certain boat and a certain skipper who ran more perils and incurred more dangers than those merely incidental to night and darkness.

Every incident of that most sorrowful day combined to cast down Ned. As if the awful void following on his mother's death and burial was not an evil sufficient, there haunted him the doom of life, now but a fortnight distant; and this, when accident had eased his mind of it for a while after dinner, was thrust back upon him by his aunt.

"Us'll try on the toggery when you've finished your meat," she said. "No doubt 'tis all right, but we'll go through it and get you rigged out. The last boy as I helped to fit was poor Billy Truscott's son—him as went down in the 'Sweetheart' on his very first voyage. I can see his mother now when they brought the news. She raved against the sea and shook her fist at it, as if 'twas a living creature. She tore her hair likewise. 'Twas a thing I'd often heard of, as being done by frantic women, but I never seen a she do it afore, and hope I never shall again. An ugly, red-eyed woman, but her grief made her stand a foot higher on the quay."

Into his 'fear naught' coat and trousers Ned presently struggled. The solid blue cloth—so thick that it could almost stand alone—chafed him and made him miserable; but Aunt Emma decided that the garments fitted well, and was equally pleased with the worsted jersey, the 'boot-stockings' of thick white wool, the underwear, and the worsted hose. Against the drawers and vest Ned cried out that they would scratch his skin to pieces; but Mrs.

Michelmore bade him wait till he had to work on the water at dead of night in winter under a north-east wind.

"You'll cry out for more to cover you then," she said. "'Tis only such things as these stand between the seafaring man and his death—as you'll find afore you've been on the water a week."

The sea boots proved too small, and the tarpaulins too large; so after dinner Mrs. Michelmore took her nephew to the shops and rectified these adjuncts of outfit.

When all was done they returned home, and later in the day, with Lydia and his aunt, Ned walked to the churchyard and spent an hour there. The children bustled themselves about the mound, cast from it flowers already perished, swept the earth from the bruised grass, and set Ned's cowslips on the head of the grave. Ned openly wept the while, and Lydia's lip trembled, and her face was cast down, but she shed few tears. As for Mrs. Michelmore, she found matter for grief less in the tomb of her sister-in-law than those round about it. She pointed out with considerable emotion that the husband of the dead had chosen this spot ill.

"If he'd but used his eyes!" she cried. "Just look —that uncertain woman, Jessie Crang, within six feet of her—a light creature that she never could abide; and, at her very shoulder, old Saul Pepperill, him as used to sail in the 'Smiling Morn'—as famous an evil liver as ever came out of Brixham. And now the first sight as her eyes will catch, come the Trump, must be that bad young woman and worse old man creeping out of their pits together. And only a span up the hill she might have gone beside Jane Tribble, a saint of God and her bestest friend. But of course he didn't know what he was doing. After all 'tis something to know where your partner lies. Look at poor Martha Brokenshire, sleeping here safe enough; but her husband, Michael as was, have got all the English Channel for his grave. He went down when

a tramp steamer cut the 'Warrior' in half by night off Portland Bill. Three married men drowned and only one boy saved, and he lived to turn his mother's hair grey afore she dropped."

Lydia flashed a lightning look of anger at the back of her aunt's withered black bonnet; but Emma Michelmore maundered on oblivious.

She sketched a dozen tragedies; and then she struck upon an immediate problem that caused her great uneasiness.

"Us'll have to sit in the mourners' pew Sunday without father! I never thought of that. He ought to have remembered it. He never ought to have sailed till after Sunday. And now us three will be there and every eye will mark us and every tongue will say: 'Where's John Major to?' 'Tis a most unheard of thing, and he must have been pretty well daft to forget it. What that man will forget next, only his God knows."

A world of misery sat on her face and her voice ascended shrill among the tombs as she stared aghast at the pending tragedy; but Lydia and Ned paid no attention to her concern.

CHAPTER III

Mr. Munday, host of 'The Sailor's Knot' on Brixham Quay, was wont to describe his public-house as a museum.

"'Tis far more than an inn," he declared, "for you'll find the walls hidden by the wonders of the sea and the Lord's doings in deep waters. There's sermons, you might say, look out at the customer on every side, to show the littleness of man and the greatness of his Maker."

To Mr. Munday the trawlers brought those strange things their nets drew off the floors of the Channel, and he had filled his bar and festooned walls and ceiling with them. Works of man and nature mingled grotesquely. Here stood the dummy head of a torpedo and two gigantic vertebræ of a whale; here hung masses of ore with 'sea trees' growing upon them, and a rocket tube from a man-of-war. Mr. Munday would show you old grapnels, an ancient sextant, and half a steering-wheel—all of which he vowed were remains of the Spanish Armada; he would then call your attention to a score of bottles that hung above the bar. They were of every shape and included Dutch, flat-bellied spirit jars and Italian wine-flasks. Oysters and barnacles decorated them all; while other oysters of original mind were also exhibited. One of these had made its home on a wooden tobacco-pipe, and another was fastened to the heel of a woman's boot. Here hung a diver's marine lamp, and here a bunch of candles half-petrified by long immersion; here were wooden pictures and carvings of ships, wrought with the best art that Jack Tar knows.

Of natural things, Mr. Munday's museum included the skull of a grampus; masses of coral and 'ross'—a sort of coraline, razor-edged, that plays havoc with the nets; sea urchins of great size starred the walls, and an angler fish, with his rod and lure nodding above his gigantic jaws, hung amongst them. The tail of a thresher and the dagger of a swordfish, the eggs of skates and the mouths of many rays close set with teeth like seed, also adorned the bar. A shark's dorsal fin and a sucker fish; enormous red spider crabs, with coral growing on their backs; a monster that had shed one claw and grown seven little pairs of pincers in place of it; a 'nickel' ray—rarest of marine creatures, with a face like a toad and a tail like a long bootlace—these and much else of like nature graced the collection of Mr. Munday. He was always ready to add fresh curiosities, and the preparation of his specimens he undertook himself. He varnished and painted many horny creatures, made the 'bull dogs' in the carapaces of cray-fish stare out upon the beholders, and added rich tones of scarlet and umber to the legs of the giant crabs. Corals and shells struck coldly upon all this wealth of warm colour and bright varnish spread round them; yet the general effect was exceedingly rich and remarkable. Not only the inn-keeper himself, but his patrons also felt personal pride in the bar of 'The Sailor's Knot.' Hardly a man of the many who drank there but had contributed something to the show from his trawl.

A great black and white gannet in a case above the door appeared to reign over the museum; and at this moment the fisherman who had shot it, and presented it to Mr. Munday in time past, regarded the bird and spoke:

"You'll have to do something to this here fowl," he said. "The tail feathers be dropping off him. I always told you that fool to Dartmouth couldn't stuff a bird."

Samuel Brokenshire was a sturdy sailor with broad

shoulders and a thick neck. He was fair, his eyes were blue, his mouth well turned and handsome. His hair was crisp, curly, and cut very close to his head. His expression appeared at once humorous and insolent. Great resolution marked it and obvious impatience of control. The most casual spectator might have guessed that here was a man who brooked no better master than himself. Brokenshire was five-and-twenty, lawless and popular. Nobody disliked him, for he was merry, genial, well-spoken, and good to look at; nobody respected him, because he ran his life on doubtful models, chose worthless friends, and lived an irregular existence. He was an orphan and dwelt in a small cottage half-way up Overgang. His grandmother kept house for him and he prospered, yet hovered for ever in the shadow of calamity. Sam owned his own boat, but all guessed it was deeply mortgaged. He kept his cutter, the 'Night Hawk,' very smart; he worked hard; but the manner of his work was a mystery. Most men suspected poaching, yet few of his companions blamed him overmuch, and many did not hesitate to declare that, but for the danger to wives and children, they would take like risks with Sam and do as he was guessed to do by night in protected waters.

This business of poaching now formed matter for debate, and Mr. Brokenshire, taking a glass of beer off the counter, went into a corner where another man sat beside a little stove.

Richard Varwell, more generally known as 'Tumbledown Dick,' was a strange object—a village Dionysian, superior to decency but not to dirt. His decayed clothes hung about him rather than covered him; his matted hair was long, his face filthy. Bright eyes flashed from this grimy countenance and hair hung about it and over his forehead, like a Skye terrier's. His beard fell in two ragged peaks upon an open shirt. Grey was sprinkled plentifully there, while the point of his Roman nose and a part of his moustache had become bright yellow from the countless cigar-

ettes that he smoked. His fingers were also stained to orange colour with tobacco juice. The man was more than fifty and boasted that he had not done a stroke of work that he could help for thirty years. He regarded himself as a socialist, and loved to hold forth on social questions to all who would listen. Politics he never wearied of discussing, and at election times he was always the first to be locked up for inciting to riot. Tumbledown Dick had one sermon, which he preached daily from the quay parapet, whenever a man or two could be got to listen. He would point across the bay to Torquay and contrast the leisured class of that wealthy congeries with the workers of Brixham, to the disadvantage of the former. He was always ripe for mischief, always ready to share his broken meat and shreds of tobacco with anybody. Few knew how or where he lived. It was believed that he robbed the farmers' scarecrows for clothes and their pig-troughs for food. The tall, lean, fantastic figure of him always woke a grin on the faces of easy men and begat a frown where minds were serious. Dick, in fact, was a skeleton at the feast of life in Brixham. Vicars had striven and police inspectors had threatened alike in vain. He was incorrigible, and yet the law never wearied of correcting him. He had preached to many Justices of the Peace and laid unanswerable arguments before them for many years. As he said himself, 'fourteen days' hard is no argument'; yet it seemed the only one their worships knew. Tumbledown Dick deliberately courted seclusion in the winter; but when the weather was fine he enjoyed the open air. Brixham had come to regard him as an institution; and such spirits as Brokenshire, who themselves warred in secret against society, found Mr. Varwell an exhilarating and congenial companion.

Sam whispered to the loafer, and Dick drew the smoke of a cigarette up through his yellow nostrils and blew it out of his mouth. Then he finished his

beer—flinging it down his throat rather than drinking it—and sucked his ragged moustache.

"In a word," said Brokenshire, "Billy Trust—you know; him that always sails with me—have broke his finger and they say at the 'orspital he must rest his hand a week. He's cruel vexed, but his wife will see he does what doctor bids him. And you know all about it; so you'd better come and put in a few nights with me till he can sail again."

"If 'twas just the every-day business, I wouldn't come," said Dick. "Not I—not to work like the tame trawler-men. But you're different. You've got your knife into law and authority and injustice, and if you mean—" he sank his voice—"Start Bay, then I'm with you, as a protest against them that would keep honest folk from their own."

A big man not far off heard the words "Start Bay," and took up the parable. He was noisy and hammered the table with his fist, but his sentiments won the approval of the others.

"'Tis a crying sin and disgrace that you fellows are kept out of that Bay, and I don't care who hears me say so."

He thumped the table, and Sam and Dick thumped the other end.

"Hear, hear, Mr. Tribble!" said Brokenshire.

"As a fish salesman I know what I'm talking about," continued Mr. Tribble, "and I say that to keep our home boats—the 'mumble-bees'[1]—out of Start Bay for the sake of a beggarly gang of long-shore crabbers, is a disgrace to the nation. Look at it. 'Twas shut up in the time of Noah, for the protection of half-grown fish, and since then generations of good flat-fish have lived and died in it, and still 'tis shut, despite the cruel badness of the times."

"They're all rogues together—them crabmen," said Brokenshire. "They stick their pots out in the fairway of craft—in mid-channel, you might almost say—and then, when some ocean-going ship sweeps

[1] *Mumble-bees*—the smaller trawlers.

the lot away to hell, what do they do? They cry out that 'tis us with our trawls inside the limits have done it."

"Put a light on the bell buoy at the Skerries," said a dark, black-bearded man sitting near Mr. Tribble. "Do that and all's as plain as a pikestaff. Then open the north side and you'll not be within a mile of the pots. However, it won't be done while some of us laugh at the bye-laws and go in the bay on dark nights." He looked at Sam Brokenshire, but the younger man showed no concern.

"Thank goodness we have got a few brave free-traders yet among our two hundred skippers," cried Dick Varwell. "And I'm proud to think that I'm getting more and more of you chaps to see the foolishness of keeping out of the Bay. Why—Lord deliver us!—what be a dirty bye-law to stand between a strong man and five or six pounds made between sundown and dawn? We'm a poor-spirited order of creation or we wouldn't sit down under it. If I was commodore of the fleet, I'd up-sail some fine morning and lead the way into that Bay and not rest till I seed two hundred boats ploughing there. Then we'd see what the Board of Fisheries would do 'Keep the bye-laws; keep the bye-laws'; that's what they're always bleating, whereas what I say in my large way, as a true friend to human nature, is this: 'Damn the bye-laws and don't let any man as is a man think about keeping 'em.'"

"'Tis in a nutshell," summed up Mr. Tribble, "Start Bay was shut to improve the fishing, and now the fishing's so good as gold 'tis still shut—not for the fishing, but for the crabbers."

"And they do what we ban't allowed to do," added Brokenshire, "for if their drag seines ban't trawls, what are they? The whole popilation comes out to get 'em in, and you'll see twenty men at one arm of the net and twenty women at t'other. But nothing's said against that."

The conversation grew more technical and more

noisy. The salesman thundered on the table; Mr. Munday begged him to argue with less energy.

"I'm very much against you, and you know it," he said. "So long as the poachers among us go to the Bay, so long will it be closed against us, and the righteous will suffer for the guilty."

"The cowards will suffer for the brave—and let 'em!" answered Dick. "They always have in the world, and they always will. If the people would list to me, Brixham would rise like one man and have its rights and set an example to the North Sea and open the eyes of England."

"You oughtn't to air such silliness, Varwell," said Mr. Munday from behind the bar. He was a bald, stout man of settled opinions.

"Of course you don't think so. You've only got three ideas in that glittering, bald noddle of yours, Thomas, and they are the Throne, the Church, and the Beer Barrel. But 'tis different with me. 'Twas my great-great-grandfather, or some such fool, carried that foreign chap, William the Dutchman, ashore when he landed in England. Brought him through the mud with the tide out, no doubt; and if he'd let him drop for the harbour crabs to eat, this country would be happier to-day than what it is. A disgrace to the name of Varwell was that man. I'm shamed every time I think his blood runs in my body."

"Get along with you," answered Mr. Munday. "'Tis a great question whether I ought to let you in my bar, Dick, for you'm a thorn in the side of the young men, and a blot on the country-side. You to talk about work for all and manhood's rights! I'm much like to see the work you'd do, even if 'twas offered you."

"No, you wouldn't, Thomas," answered Dick. Then he winked at Mr. Brokenshire and rose to depart. "Let work worthy of my thinking parts be put afore my notice, and I dare say some of you toilers would be a good bit astonished to see how I did it," he concluded. "I'm waiting for the red revolution,

Thomas; I'm biding my time. It may come while I'm still trotting about, or it may not; but if it does, then you bet your boots I shan't be idle."

With these great promises Tumbledown Dick marched off, and the master of the 'Night Hawk' soon followed him. But they went different ways, for the loafer proceeded to some unknown haunt inland, while Sam looked at his watch, then quickened his pace, and set out briskly to Berry Head.

He climbed the hill, cast a glance at the house of the Majors as he passed it, walked by the coastguard station, and then, leaving the road, disappeared among the furzes, thorn trees, and limestone bluffs beyond. Presently he stood by one of the ruined cottages that still lift their fragments here; then Sam leapt through an empty portal and met a girl. She was sitting very patiently on the edge of a broken mantelpiece, waiting for him, but as he filled the doorway she jumped from her perch and ran to him. In a moment his arms were fast round her, and he was rubbing his red cheek gently against her brown one.

"I'm late, Lyddy," he said; "but I know you'll forgive me, like the dinky dear you be."

"All the same, I wouldn't have waited much longer for you," declared Lydia Major. "You may laugh, Sam, but I promise you I wouldn't."

CHAPTER IV

The lovers, as lovers will, revealed themselves unconsciously in their hopes and fears. Lydia's courtship had been secret, for her father was no admirer of Mr. Brokenshire or his ways. But the girl loved Sam with passionate joy, and not the less for a mystery that shadowed his name. He talked much nonsense to her on the subject of the rights of man; while she believed all that he said, and, through the eyes of love, saw him a great hero. Sometimes his rumoured performances struck upon a moment of unclouded perception, and showed Sam to Lydia in a different light; but his presence banished doubt, his voice awoke new trust.

To-night he talked of the future, and indicated his intentions. She sat on his lap, and he broke his speech with many kisses.

"After your eighteenth birthday I'm going to beard the lion and come afore your father and ax him to let me marry you all fair and square," began Sam. "He's got his knife into me and another here and there, because—we work late and think our own thoughts and won't be under the heel of other people; but he's a fair man, and I mean to show him the world can't stand still because he wants it to."

"That's all very fine, Sam, but what about Start Bay?"

"You mind your own business," he said, and hugged her. "No man has ever proved that I've been inside the limits—have they? Very well, then—wait till they do prove it. Hearsay's only believed by fools, and threats only frighten children. If I'm caught on the wrong side of the marks, then let your

father think and speak what he likes. Till that happens, no man has any right to say anything; and if I bring better fish to morning market than t'others—then I say I'm a better fisherman. No call for me to tell my secrets. 'Tis every one for hisself; and I'm for you, and I'm going to get you, spite of Jack Major, or fifty such. But I do hope he'll be reasonable. No living man can prove hookem-snivey dealings against me. My boat's my own, I've got a few pound saved, I'm steady as time, and I've never done another chap a bad turn in my life."

"That I'm sure you haven't."

"And never will. And because me and your father think different in politics and such like, that's no reason why he should refuse me."

"He will, however."

Sam shrugged his shoulders and played with Lydia's hair.

"If you can say that—so hopeful as you generally be—then no doubt he will. And then, if words won't do it, I must take to deeds. And, for that matter, I'm always better pleased to be doing than talking, though 'tis often brought against me by people that I'm lazy. 'Lazy'! Me lazy! Don't I breed my own trawl-nets? Can't I make my own irons as well as the blacksmith, and my own beams as well as the carpenter, and bark my own sails as well as Uncle Peach? But if your father says I ban't to have you—then he'll get his eyes opened very sharp, I warn you of that, Lydia, though he is your father. I'll stand injustice from no man while I can lift my hand. Whatever else I may or may not be, I'm going to be your husband—God judge me if I ban't!"

She caressed him and returned to the problem. Danger and difficulty delighted her—at this distance.

"But what would you do, Sam, if father's firm and won't give in about it?"

"I know very well what I'd do. I've got an invention all ready. But we'll leave that for a bit. We'll hope he'll listen to sense, though he's the sort that reckons all sense but his own be nonsense. We'll see what the pair of us can come at before your birthday. And by the same token, what be I to buy you against it?"

"I don't want you to spend your money on me, Sam."

"Who should it go on then? No other girl but you will ever get a penny of mine—never again. Did your father see me at the funeral? But I know he did. I took very good care that he should."

"Yes, he did. Ned mentioned it and asked him if he'd seen you."

"What did he think of it?"

"Never mind that."

"But I want to know. He couldn't say nought against that, surely?"

"He said that he was a good bit surprised to find that you had Sunday black; and that he shouldn't have expected it."

"I'll surprise him more than that presently. Surely he thought 'twas a civil and respectful thing in me to be there?"

"He didn't think about it."

"And what about they grand roses and lilies and ferns on the grave?"

"What about them?" she asked, starting.

"Well, I put them there—for your sake, Lyddy."

"You! Father was pleased, in a quiet way, over them. He knew they were glass-house flowers and thought that they'd come from one of the quality."

"Not at all," said Sam. "They comed from me."

"Wherever did you get them?"

"No matter. They won't be missed. I know an under-gardener or two, in a place where they keep ten."

She was troubled.

"'Tis things like that, Sam, make people fearful for you."

"Let 'em mind their own business."

"Well, I am father's business—at any rate he thinks so. And if he liked you—which he doesn't—he'd never let us wed till I'm up twenty-five."

"Good Lord! How d'you know that?"

"'Tis one of his fixed sayings, that no woman should go into married life sooner—not if he could prevent it."

"Cold-blooded old devil!"

"Sam!"

"I don't mean that, but there!—such opinions make me wild. I'm twenty-five this minute—very near twenty-six—and be I to wait till I'm an old man for 'e? No, by God!"

She grew tearful.

"Well, I put you first in the world and always shall," she said. "I hope 'tisn't wicked; but so 'tis, and very well you know it. First—first—always and for ever."

He crowed and cuddled her.

"You'm the true, faithful sort, Lyddy."

"But are you, I wonder?"

"Faithful as the sun."

She jumped off his lap at this assurance and bade him strike a match, for it was growing dark.

"There's plenty of light to kiss by," he said.

"Strike a match," she repeated. "I want to show you something."

He obeyed and she took the light from him and held it up to the broken plaster of the wall. On a smooth spot appeared two hearts overlapping and transfixed with an arrow. Upon one the initials of Lydia appeared, while "S.B." adorned the other. Beneath was a date.

"That's all right," said Sam. "I set it there the day you said you'd take me. Don't you remember?"

"Yes, I remember," she answered. "But do you remember——? Give me the matches and come into this little chamber. Mind the floor—it has rotted away and the ceiling's half down too."

She led him into another room of the ruin. The lath and plaster above was partly fallen and hung in a great threatening sheaf from broken rafters; the floor was full of holes; the walls still supported drooping and rotting paper.

"Look here, Sam," said the girl, as she struck another match, "there's a lot of lovers have writ their letters here, and I know most of 'em well enough; but who are these?"

She held up the flickering light to another emblem of hearts and arrow. It closely resembled Mr. Brokenshire's recent record in the outer chamber; but it differed in the particulars of the date and one pair of initials. The record was nearly a year old.

"Cuss the little cat!" said Sam. "But you know that story well enough, Lyddy. I never hid it."

"I didn't know it had gone so far as that."

"In a sort of a way it had. She—but there, I can't speak against women. I liked her well enough till she gave up liking me. 'Twas the money that t'other chap had. And he hid behind his money, so she couldn't get a true sight of him. And now she finds 'twas all a bait, for he only dangled it, and then he drew it in again when he'd caught her."

"Mr. Harris wasn't the man to let her handle his money."

"No, and she've found that out by now. She's poorer than she'd have been with me, for all her husband's cash—and the shop, too. I don't wish her no worse than she's got, though she did treat me bad. She wasn't worthy to black your shoes at her best; and the luckiest thing that ever happened to me was when she chucked me."

"Perhaps 'twill be your turn to pay us women back for what she did to you, and fling me off, Samuel?"

"If I do, Lyddy, let 'em fling me off—the top of Berry Head. You'll be my wife afore this time next year, or I don't know myself."

"You were the first I ever loved, and you'll be the last," she said.

"And you was the first I ever loved with my whole heart and soul—I swear that afore the Lord. Her cruel love of money always did make me savage with Sarah. And oft we quarrelled over it."

"We've never had a word, Sam."

"And never shall. Never was a pair built for each other like us."

The dusk had drawn down, and now Brokenshire helped Lydia from the ruin and prepared to see her home.

"I wish I could ask you in to supper," she said; "but father wouldn't allow that."

"I reckon not. The first time him and me sits at a table together 'twill be at mine by the look of it."

"You'll show him you're different to what he thinks."

Sam lit his pipe and did not answer.

"Are you going to sea to-night?" she asked.

"Ess; if you peep from your chicket window half afore midnight you'll see the 'Night Hawk' and another hard-working boat, perhaps, taking the tide. Venus be chasing the moon just now, and the wind's set for good and all in the north-east by the looks of it."

"How's Mr. Trust?"

"He's broke his finger, and has to bide home. Who do 'e think be coming in his place? Tumbledown Dick!"

"What's the good of that bunch of rags in a boat?"

"More than you'd think. I know all about Dick. 'Tisn't the first time he's been to sea—nor the first time he's been in the 'Night Hawk,' for that matter. There's nothing that man don't know behind his dirt and chatter. He's taught me a lot worth remembering, Lyddy."

"Better that you don't tell father so. Dick Varwell is the only man I ever saw who makes him right down angry. He says 'tis a shameful thing

that such as Dick are allowed to cumber the quay and lead young men astray."

"I know. But let them that be angry with him answer him. 'Tis because they've got nothing to reply to his argument that they be angry."

"Father says he's worse than one of the radical newspapers; but I'm not with father about such things. I thought a lot when there was talk about me going for a school teacher."

"You come and teach me; and the sooner the better."

"Don't be caught with Varwell, any way," she said. "Be warned against that; for the justices would judge you by the company you kept, Sam."

"I shan't be catched at all. And more wouldn't Varwell, if he didn't choose. That man arranges to go into klink just as cool as me and you will arrange to go for a honeymoon afore long."

"Home is very different without poor mother. And 'twill be worse still when Ned's gone, and there's nothing but Aunt Emma and the horrors from morning till night."

"I'll soon take you out of it. Be Ned pulling a very long face about sailing?"

"Yes, he can't bear the thought of it."

"Poor toad! He'll never make a fisherman; and it shows your father's foolishness to think he will. When I was nine year old, hosses wouldn't have kept me out of my father's boat; and though I saw him drowned and only got saved by the skin of my teeth, when the 'Warrior' was sunk off Portland, I was to sea again inside a month. But Ned—a good ploughboy spoiled; that's what he'll be."

Then they reached the door of Lydia's home, and as Mrs. Michelmore happened to be standing at it talking to a postman, Sam's farewell was brief. A letter had arrived from Mr. Major. He was working off Lundy Island and making good catches. He intended to be back, however, in the course of ten days; and he directed that Ned should be equipped

and ready to accompany him when next he went to sea.

"I was hopeful as the North Channel would keep father a good bit yet," confessed the boy to Lydia. "Any way, he promised me that my first cruise shouldn't be round land, and that it should not last above three days."

"You'll surely like it so well as the other boys after you're used to it," declared his sister; but he shook his head mournfully.

"I'm a land bird, and always shall be," he told her.

"Think of Deborah," said Lydia, laughing. She already saw the dawn of a romance between Ned and Mr. Honeywill's small daughter, and took some delight in it.

But even the thought of Deborah could not cheer her brother at this season.

"Deb hates the sea worse than what I do," he declared.

CHAPTER V

Berry Farm stood half a mile from the cliff edge west of Berry Head, and only a pathway wound between its outlying acres and the scarps and crags of limestone that here hemmed in earth and lifted it two hundred feet above ocean. The land was good, though Nicholas Honeywill, after the manner of his class, found little to praise in it. He did not lack intelligence, yet clung to ancestral nonsense about sea blights that cankered the corn, and sea winds that brought anbury upon the root crops. But despite these and other disasters, he fared well, and the mutton he raised on Berry Head was second only to that bred upon the mightier promontory of Portland.

To-day, under conditions of rare atmospheric clarity, Portland itself loomed like a low cloud far to seaward of Torbay. It was just visible to those who knew where to look for it, and Tom Honeywill pointed it out now to his sister. The children were making holiday in honour of their friend, Ned Major, because it was the last holiday that he would get for many a day. Deborah differed at every point from her brother, for he was fat and rosy, and she was thin and brown. Her bright eyes, quick movements, pretty little wistful face set in rough black hair, and thin brown hands, always put Ned in mind of a marmoset monkey that he had once seen. He was frankly attached to her, and she liked him dearly too, and admired his opinions and his person. They were both silent children, and both took pleasure in the same simple amusements; but Tommy belonged to a different and more usual order. He declared a contempt for girls and his sister did not

escape it. He tolerated her for her usefulness, but that Ned could like her and enjoy her company, without any advantage gleaned therefrom, lowered young Major not a little in the estimation of Deborah's brother.

There were manly things, however, that Ned could do much better than Tommy, and one was the climbing of cliffs. In this branch of sport Ned had won a well-deserved fame, and to-day he proposed to practise it for the delight of Deborah. Nor did he forget the admiration that must fall to him as a reward. It was fortunate for the sea-gulls that Ned's sentimental nature stood between him and substantial thefts. To their nests he reached in a way that few boys dared; but he seldom did more than study the homes of the great birds, while they stormed and shrieked round his head. When Deborah wanted an egg, she had it; but she shared his dislike of death, even in the potential form of bird-nesting, and Tommy, while his respect for Ned was not withheld, when he scaled this ledge or reached that crevice by exercise of mysterious skill, felt nothing but contempt for the climber if he returned empty-handed to safety again.

Where the limestone in great sloping scales and shields, like the armour of a dragon, overlaps upon the sides of the headland and slopes with increasing precipitation to the sea, these children had their playground. Among crags and precipices, amid the abrupt undulations of the land, was a wild region shattered and broken by steps of stone and brakes of furze and blackthorn. Here teasels, tree mallow, hounds-tongue, and the everlasting pea, sprang and trailed in tangled rivalry. Sappy crucifers, with glaucous foliage and violet blossoms, rose beside them; the meadow-rue throve in the gorse, and rarer plants might also be found by seeing eyes. Ned and his friends shared this playground with the rabbits and raptorial birds. Sometimes the young folk played upon the downs, and sometimes in the em-

brasures of those virgin forts lifted about the Head in hasty terror, when Napoleon's shadow fell upon our shores. The cliffs chimed and rang with the mewing and laughter of countless gulls. The same birds that waddled with easy, fearless insolence in the harbour offal, and fought, almost under the fishermen's feet, for orts and abominations, here swept and wheeled and hovered, like sea spirits, about the uplifted boundaries of earth. Their grey feathers and white flashed against the sunny sky; and they were wild and wonderful again—scavengers no more, but lovely, fearful things, crying at the sight of man and trembling for their nests and nurseries.

The limestone is fair to see at Berry Head. Its giddy turrets and needles, its broken faces, scarps, and counterscarps, girt with the transparent green of a calm sea or the flashing foam of wind-driven waves, are a home and haunt of light. On sunny days light indeed makes revel among them, leaps and twinkles in the networks of delicate clefts, weaves patterns on the flat faces of the crags, touches their jags and angles with silver fire at noon, and floods them with rosy gold when the day wanes. The light leaps upward by stone stairways and falls by dark buttresses and acclivities to twinkle out again beneath. It loses itself among the hollow places, then flashes forth once more in those dazzling lines and splashes that sunshine on marble alone can scatter. Light inspires these great cliffs with apparent levity. They seem to float, and the foam fringes wrapped about them suggest a movement in the advancing earth rather than impulse of tide or wind on water. Each rock and lifted mass fades in the sun haze seaward and dreams out of the foam, as though wrought of some imponderable, pearly staple, lifted from beneath the ocean and ready to shake out sails and soar. Painted in all colours, through the metals to the gems, these great cliff faces shine—from the glow of the fire opal and the glitter of rosy quartz to the blue of the turquoise, where sea light is thrown up

into some shadowy cavern. Iron flushes the stone in veins and percolations, and the plants that love the lime make great splendour: of flame yellow in the stonecrops; of rose, where the thrift hangs in clumps and cushions to the edge of dizzy slopes; of silver and purple when sea campion and sea lavender star the steep places; of chrysoprase, where the samphire lolls from nook and niche. Unnumbered lesser things mottle the cliffs largely with their minute life, and lichens—ivory and ebony, grey and gold—wash the rocks with faint or rich colours to gladden the sunlight that seeks them and reveals their beauty.

Sovereign among those earth giants, that clasp hands to make the girdle of Devon, is marble. The chalk can tell no such rainbow story; the genial sandstone varies little; the dark foreheads of the northern cliffs speak less of beauty than of power; the lime alone is always fair in colour and splendid in form. No sunrise wakens, no gloaming fades upon it, but some fresh wonder of light is blazoned here, or some new mystery of darkness shadowed.

Now Ned began to climb and Tommy followed him. Surefooted and sure-eyed the taller boy went out along a broken ledge, jumped to a lower one and then scrambled round a projecting point on to the ragged face of the cliffs. Deborah, from a station above, watched him, but she felt no fear for Ned. Her heart beat quicker only on her brother's account. Ned made the rocks look as easy as a flight of stairs, but Tommy's methods were very different, and by his caution and tardy advance; by his set lips and frowning face, he indicated a danger that the other boy's skill concealed.

"For goodness' sake come back, Tom!" cried his sister. "You know mother's told you a hundred times to keep off the cliffs."

Tom did not answer, but climbed on, and presently —very hot and very short of breath—he stood beside his friend on a little platform, with a stark drop of a hundred feet beneath it, and a furrowed penthouse of

the rocks above. The gulls whirled round them, and their outcry rose to a crescendo of despair, for here were the nests, and Ned now pointed out how the birds had brought scurvy grass, stonecrops and other green things, and worked this material into the usual fabric of twigs and feathers. Great eggs, mottled with all tones of chocolate colour, reposed here, and Tommy opened an old tobacco-tin, full of cotton wool, that he had brought for the purpose. He wanted to empty the three nests now within their reach, and declared that his mother liked nothing so well as a sea-gull's egg 'to her breakfast'; but Ned doubted this and, in any case, as the leader of the expedition, refused such wholesale robbery.

"You may take one, and no more," he said.

"And one for Deborah," said Tommy.

"No; she don't like 'em."

A solitary egg was picked up and packed in the tobacco-tin; then Ned started back the way that he had come. The return journey was more difficult and, much against his will, the sturdier boy had to shout for aid at one awkward place.

"I be just a thought too short to reach this here rock!" he cried. "You'd best to come back, Ned, and give me a hand."

Ned returned, and soon the climbers rejoined Deborah. She praised them both and begged them to do no more; but there was more to do. Tommy wanted some jackdaws' eggs, and Ned believed that he knew the eyrie of a hawk in the cliffs to westward. They climbed and incurred very real risks until they were weary; then Ned found another sea-gull's nest, in a spot so easily reached that he decided Deborah herself must come to see it. She started without fear, but found herself giddy and miserable in a moment. With some difficulty Ned got her to the nest, and then her thoughts ran so entirely upon the problem of how she was to get back again, that she took no pleasure or interest in the discovery. Finally, she shut her eyes tightly, left her feet and hands

entirely to the disposal of the boys and so, panting and distressed, returned to the head of the cliff again.

Tommy was triumphant, and Ned concerned.

"That'll larn you to know what climbing means!" said Deborah's brother. "You think 'tis so easy, but now you see how me and Ned risk our necks every time we go down over, and make nought of it."

The girl had indeed perceived this fact, and it was unfortunate, for she could no longer watch either of them without acute concern. Ned strove to comfort her. As they ate their meal in a shadow of the rocks, where Mr. Honeywill's field ended and the cliffs began, young Major declared that climbing, like immunity from sea-sickness, was an accident.

"Some would never turn a hair, even if they was standing where them gulls be," he said; "and some won't go down a flight of stairs without holding the banisters."

They ate and planned new adventures, while Deborah begged them to do no more.

"You've frightened the poor birds enough," she said; "and you've frightened me too."

Where they sat, among the budding tussocks of sea-pinks, the birds still swooped about them and great gulls circled above and below, crying danger from lemon-coloured bills. They fluttered in a cloud, and turned and shot this way and that. They balanced on pinnacles and turrets, then furled their wings, and so stood to make proper finials for the wild architecture of the cliffs; they flung themselves off again into the air and slid away seaward, to float together and star the green water below with little galaxies of brightness.

Ned and Deborah had a game that they played. Sometimes, sitting on a marble throne together, among the wrinkles on the cliff's dawn-facing brow, they pretended to be king and queen of the sea-gulls. Here they reigned very happily, sent the birds on flying messages to land and ocean, and claimed all

as subjects, from the mightiest adult to the least downy squab just out of the egg.

The childish amusement shadowed life, though they knew it not; for these distrustful things of air and water judged them and their intrusion even as they, presently, would judge those world forces of time, chance, change that the days to come must bring. The fate that might threaten their little airy castle, the shadow that might fall upon their highest hope, would win from their young hearts anon even such cries as these of the great fowls before their harmless advent. Unwinged, untrusted, strange to the bird people and their city, the children sat here not seldom together, thought kindly of the wild things that feared them, and would have done them nothing but good had they known how.

Tommy, struck with an inspiration, declared presently that the day was done and that he meant to go home. Deborah doubted, but Ned, the least suspicious of boys, did not think again upon the matter. Tommy therefore marched off, hid behind a clump of furze until the other children were out of sight, and then returned to the nests that Ned had found in the morning. The adventure of climbing to them alone, and helping himself with greater generosity than his friend had permitted, had flashed upon Tom as a grand possibility; and now he carried it out. Complete success attended the achievement. He packed four eggs into his tobacco tins, broke two more, sucked one, and caught an infant gull. Sport of this varied description appealed much to Tommy. Indeed he decided that in future he would come to the cliffs alone. Then he returned to Berry Farm as the sun began to set, and narrated his adventures at great length to his mother. Not until darkness fell did Deborah come home—to find Tom trying to make his unhappy young gull eat Indian corn.

Deborah was tearful, and in her mind dwelt a parting that had been very sad to her. She and Ned

stopped upon the cliffs until the sun sank and the wind sank with him. Under the glow of fading light they looked at the sea and marked a boat or two almost becalmed on their homeward way. Ned knowing the cut of the 'Jack and Lydia,' saw that she was among the rest.

"'Tis the third," he said. "They'm all 'round land' boats back from the North Channel. And the next time father sails, I've got to go too."

She tried to cheer him, and in some measure succeeded; but then, when he seemed happier, she herself grew miserable, and it became his task to comfort her.

Under the gloaming they turned towards home. The day had been one of almost summer heat, and while yet the sky burnt red along the purple haze of earth, a thin mist crept over their path where it crossed green meadows in a coomb. Beyond these rose Berry Farm and its elm trees, all dark against the ruddy sky. Under dying glimmer of twilight seven white ducks were working in a row down the meadow. The grassland was dark as wine, where it sloped upward to a high hedge that divided it from the light of the sky. The ducks, sunk to uncertain splashes of chill grey, waddled onwards, feeding upon the slimy life that evening and moisture had tempted forth. None interfered with her neighbours; and when they reached the limits of the pasture, they turned almost simultaneously, quacked, and set forth down the field again. In the dim hedgerow, beside which the boy and girl presently moved, primroses lifted small wan faces; the stars came out above them, and both felt their young hearts full.

"Oh, the beautiful land, and all the creatures!" sighed Ned.

"The sea be full of creatures too," she said.

"But so different. The cows and sheep and even they ducks there—they be all warm and trust to the air like us. But the sea things—I hate 'em. They

glaze at you out of their dead eyes; and when they'm alive they'm still as cold as death; and yet I don't like to see 'em die, for nobody takes the trouble to kill 'em when they're dragged up."

"You can trust your father to do the right thing."

"Yes, I can—but——"

Presently he uttered a wish that made her laugh.

"If only Tom could get into my skin and I could get in his!"

The time and place were come for them to part, yet Ned dreamed not of any formal leave-taking. He had never shaken hands with Deborah in his life, and intended no such ceremony at this moment. But she was a girl; Ned was her hero; her emotions suddenly quickened before this most sorrowful departure and farewell. She had wit to feel that it meant a great change in Ned's life; she had heart enough to know that the change would also be felt very keenly by her. Now, before he could exclaim or protest, the little thing kissed him. He felt her sunbonnet touch his ears, and her lips upon his cheek.

"Well, I never!" cried the boy and stood, stupid, staring and hot, under the darkness.

But she was gone.

"I'll come up over first minute that I come back, to tell you all the news!" he shouted after her; but she did not answer. His heart throbbed; he watched her flutter away, like a soft night moth, through the dimpsy light, and then he went home. Once or twice he stood still upon the road; once or twice he stumbled. His thoughts were bigger, stranger, more wonderful than any thoughts that had ever wandered through his young brains until that hour.

CHAPTER VI

A LARGE patience with life distinguished John Major. He expected little from it and took good fortune and bad in simple belief that both belonged to his destiny, and that the proportions were perfectly mingled by Providence. His faith in religion was absolute, and he regulated his existence by the precepts of Christianity to the best of his power. He was a Christian man who followed his direction logically, so far as life allowed it, and he made no demur when others succeeded and prospered far better, in proportion as they conformed to the actual practices of social intercourse and the actual code of human relations in business and affairs.

Perhaps the man had but one ambition: that his son should carry on the family tradition at sea and preserve the unbroken line of the Majors as Brixham fishermen. This, in that it was seemly and reasonable, he expected to happen. Of his boy he knew little, save that he was gentle and kindly and exceedingly like his mother. That no mighty desire to join the boat existed in Ned was, of course, clear to his father, and that he took an active interest in the land, John Major also perceived. He had always preferred to work on their half-acre of earth, than put off to help paint or polish the 'Jack and Lydia'; he liked better the flowers than the fishes, and showed on land an inquiring and active spirit that the sea only served to dull. But the significance of these facts was but dimly perceived by the father, and if he marked it, an explanation always occurred to him. The sea for Ned meant work, and he knew that; the land was only play. Naturally, therefore, with a human instinct proper to youth still unbroken,

he turned to the pleasant things and shunned those that must stand for real life and its labours and cares.

"If he'd been a farmer's boy, now," explained John to Emma Michelmore, "I lay my life he'd have hated the sight of a plough, and only been happy messing about with the boats; but because he knows that the boats for him mean work and not play, he turns to the things of the soil. 'Tis the usual contrariness of human nature, and I set no store by it. He's not afraid of work and knows the meaning of duty, as every Christian boy did ought to know at fourteen, if his parents have done their duty by him."

The truth, however, lay deeper than John had a mind to plumb. It belonged to his boy's character: it arose out of far-off hereditary causes and a personal variation from the old stock. Perhaps in the ancestry of his mother a very good answer to the mystery might have been found; but the material cause mattered little: the fact remained that Ned's bent was the earth, and that not merely did he feel no desire toward the sea, but experienced an active aversion from it. Whether environment might modify this aversion; whether his future life might presently strike down the barriers of personal feeling and instinct, now standing between Ned Major and his predestined calling, remained to be seen. At present the prospect dulled his sensibility and made his heart heavy. He faced the inevitable in a spirit sad for such a young boy. Seldom has a youth set out upon life with so little gladness and such indifferent ambition. The thing that his father supposed to be an end of life, he regarded as a means only. But that was his secret and he hid it close. He hesitated even to think of it himself, for something whispered to Ned that to harbour this ultimate hope was disloyal to his father; yet no young heart can beat at all without some guiding star. A goal was as vital to Ned as meat and drink; and his hope took shape of the good red earth, seen dimly and afar

after dreary years of tossing upon the sea. Even in that remote ambition lurked grief, because this boy had a measure of sensitive feeling handed to him from his mother's race; and when he thought of some homestead in the distant hills—far beyond reach of the sound or sight of any sea—he suffered. John Major was the first great reality of life to Ned. He had sense already to understand, and power to appreciate a little of his father's high nature. A better man he knew not, or a man more different from the rest. He hastened often to the company of his father after some chance hour in the harbour.

There was something fearful in the presence of fishermen to Ned during his early boyhood. As they came off the boats, climbed the steps and stood again on shore, they looked to him less than men. The sea moulded them hideously. They were scarred and stained and seared with the salt of life and the tribulations and toils of it. Their hands were not like human hands. They had been cut to pieces by wet ropes, and were often distorted and maimed. Here was a thumb lopped off and here a finger. The arms of the men ended in hairy claws rather than hands; they looked metamorphosed to the likeness of the crabs and crayfish that came out of the sea. Their faces were terrible to him—different to the faces of the men on the land. Some looked as though hacked out of wood; some seemed stamped from grey iron; some were grotesque and hairy as the cocoanut faces in the shop windows. Stained and written with all manner of stories that he could not read, they passed along. Wounds and scars of wounds were upon them. Some had lost an eye, some had broken a nose, some went lame, many were lashed and torn to the bone with strange gashes that forked like lightning upon their foreheads and their cheeks. They were terrible when they swore and cursed, and poured filthy language out of their lips; and they were more terrible when they laughed and jested about things he could not under-

stand, yet guessed must be of ill repute. Dreadful in reality, demonian in his dreams, were the fishermen to Ned at the time of his callow youth. But that stage passed. They frightened him no more. He knew that they were brave and nearly always kind.

Ned hungered for manliness as much as any other natural boy; yet the manliness of these men seemed to him only brutishness. The very reek and stench of them, as they came filthy and unshorn off the sea, was not so dreadful to his mind as their eyes—heavy, soulless, like the horse that ploughed or the sheep that grazed. Dogs had more answering light in the faces of them than these weary, wave-beaten creatures. They lumbered ashore, shouldered their way upon the quay, sold their fish, and vanished to their dens, their females, and their cubs on the hills round about. The splendour of it and the irony of it—the underlying facts, that this dull race of strong men was justifying existence finely, yet toiling for too small a reward, and winning from life far less than their desert—these things Ned knew not. He had the clear eye of the child, but had no art to glean the inside meaning of what he saw so perfectly, so painfully from outside. His senses received the spectacle of the fisherman's life, and his heart was sickened. He saw Arthur Michelmore and William Gilberd, his father's hands, and he marked that they were like the rest. Their life had made them ugly, and their speech, when John Major was not by to overhear it, resembled the others. And Harry Michelmore, the boy now turned man, whose place Ned was soon to take in the boat—he showed the stamp of the sea also. Already he was furrowed and weather-beaten; already he rolled in his walk and went heavily in his great sea-boots, and filled his speech with cursing and coarseness.

Thus, at fourteen, Ned was unusually thoughtful; and his ultimate hopes accordingly suffered some clouding of regret, because there was in him a suspicion that his father's life should be good enough

and high enough for him also. His father showed how a man might go to sea and keep his body as clean as his soul; his father wished him to be a fisherman, and who was Ned to feel any desire contrary to his father's desire, or hunger for a life other than his father's life? His green spirit debated these things with misery; and sometimes a sort of dim thankfulness brooded in it, because his father had decided, and that for him remained only to obey. He knew of boys who had run away to sea; but never of one who had run away from sea, or even thought of such a thing. He, indeed, had thought of it, but his mind was not built in that pattern; he felt no desire toward adventures; his instinct was to obey those set in authority over him. So now he turned his face to the sea, and made good resolutions and trusted the large wisdom of his father in this matter. Happily the first crisis of his life left him without much immediate possibility of more suffering before the second. His mother's death had taxed his powers of sustaining grief to the uttermost, and before that paramount shock, when it returned to him in its full significance fitfully, even the sea looked a lesser evil.

And now the day had come, and somewhat self-conscious in his new clothes, Ned walked beside his father to the harbour at six o'clock, while the slate roofs of his home flashed back the first fires of morning, and a riotous east wind tore ragged foam-ridges along the bay. He passed resolutely forward, but spoke not. He was full of a great determination to quit himself like a man. He did not look at the sea; but he remembered that his father had said at breakfast that they should find something more than a trawling breeze outside the bay. The remark was intended for Mrs. Michelmore, but he heard it.

Ned glanced up at King William's statue as he came on to the quay, and its bulbous eyes and melancholy beak did nothing to hearten him. It seemed that the grotesque stone was taking a gloomy farewell, that a prediction of woe emanated from its

mournful countenance. He stood still a moment and stared at it, as though the white monster was a new thing to him—blown hither by the east wind in the night.

The harbour was alive; the wharves were awake; and their tympany of noises, familiar enough to Ned, yet struck his ear with a new meaning to-day. The breezes met him here—cold enough and sweet, from their journey through the harbour heads. A bustle and confusion reigned on every side. Twenty big dandy ketches were just away for the journey round the Land's End to St. George's Channel, and men put off to them with loaves and food and parcels and fat canvas kit-bags that held their clothes. Carts rolled and rattled along the streets laden with gear. Here came a trawler's beam, to be thrown with a mighty splash into the water, and then towed to the boat that needed it; here were a pair of irons, here a length of trawl-warp. Sails were coming down from the barking yards, bright with new ochre; boxes and crates clattered to the quay on handcarts; from the boats in harbour came thud of hammers, clank of chains, and rattle of blocks. Men shouted and bawled; boys yelled and raced about; dogs were busy as the busiest, noisy as the noisiest; and above all, wheeling everywhere, with heads turning this way and that, the grey gulls and the brown gulls floated serene, bright-eyed, to mew and utter their dry, chuckling laughter. In harbour the air was drenched with the odour of tar and twine; light glittered and rioted over the harmony of bright mud, with the red hulls reposing upon it; over the bright amber-coloured masts that sprang dense as a giant reed-bed above them. A hazy mist of cordage shone here, and the naked poles were capped with little golden weather-vanes, from which, like flowers, flashed scraps of fluttering bunting, scarlet and yellow and green.

In blue jerseys and russet overalls—in sea colour and sail colour—the fishermen were clad. They stumped and hurried about so full of their own

business that not one had leisure to give Ned a welcome or to wish him well.

Dick Varwell, who, among his virtues, was an early riser, already occupied his usual place on a swinging chain between two stone pillars at the quay. He was smoking and watching other men work.

"Ah! Ned—so you're off, my bold hero. Well" —he winked out at the wild sea—"good luck to your breakfast!"

"'Tis terrible rough—eh?" asked the boy.

"Get along with you!" cried Michelmore, who stood by the steps waiting for the rest of the crew, "no more than a good trawling breeze wi' a reef in."

John Major, who had stopped to talk to a salesman, next came along. He answered Varwell's salutation with the slightest nod; yet the father in him made his heart a little warmer when Tumbledown Dick spoke kindly of Ned and declared that he had never seen a finer youngster set out to sea.

"Worthy to carry on the name," he said, "and I hope there'll be Majors to sail out of Brixham as long as there be fishing-boats to carry 'em."

"Thank you, thank you. 'Tis a kind speech—sure enough," answered John, doubtfully gazing at the man who uttered it. Then he went down to the boat, wondering how it came about that this worthless creature, swinging on the chain above, could speak so good a thing to him. At any rate no other had thought to say as much.

"'Tis a lesson that we can't keep good out of anybody," he confided to Gilberd, who sat beside him while the younger men rowed. "Good will creep into the human heart. For why? It be built to hold it, and 'tis no more to be kept out of us than bolts and bars can keep out light."

William Gilberd, however, shook his head.

"'Tis because he had the craft to say what he knowed would please a father's ear," he answered. "Nought but his cunning. There ban't more good hid in Tumbledown Dick than marrow in a dry bone."

CHAPTER VII

Out went the boat, grinding the green water under her bow as she rounded the harbour head and rolled into the lop of a running sea. Past the ice-house, where white, frozen bars climbed aloft on an endless stairway, past the slips, where a growing boat thrust her yellow ribs aloft at water's brink, they rowed; then Ned set his teeth to see the great foam-headed waves racing furiously at them out of the bay beyond. They felt the drag of the tide before they reached the 'Jack and Lydia.' It seemed to pull the boat's nose down into the water; but she came up again with a leap like a cork, and the slap of the spray only struck sun-fire from the tarpaulins of Arthur and Harry Michelmore, where they tugged at the oars.

No friendly message from the sea came to Ned; hidden in his heart, yet not hidden from his father's eye, was fear. He fought it, and supposed that none had seen; but his furtive eye told the tale to the man at the helm. John Major was merciful, yet he smarted before the sight.

In twenty minutes, and not without a struggle, the boat had reached the trawler and was soon dragged aboard. Here seemed a strong fortress against the waves compared with the cockleshell that had brought him hither, and Ned set to work with prompt obedience. He knew the name of everything, and showed a promise of smartness as yet beyond the power of his staggering land-legs to execute. But the fishermen were transformed, and he could not fail to mark it. They, who rolled like porpoises ashore and seemed scarcely able to drag their mighty sea-boots along the quays or up the winding stairways, were agile and swift with a rolling deck under their feet. They

hopped about like monkeys, worked magically, brought life and order into the ropes and rattling spars. They had eyes in the backs of their heads for swinging booms; they had ten hands apiece; they anticipated every order, toiled together, each at his proper task, like the wheels and cranks of an engine. Ned was bade to go aft and watch Harry, whose place afloat henceforward he would take.

The stiff north-easter hummed overhead, and Mr. Major's craft rolled to her gunwales in the following seas; but five minutes had not passed when all was changed. At a touch the dead timber, screaming ropes, and flapping canvas were tuned to work. The 'Jack and Lydia' cast off her moorings, made sail, steadied to the wind, and woke. She lifted like a giant to the first billow, and Ned felt a sort of fearful exultation at the mighty leap of her as she heeled over, crashed into the seas, and ground them foaming beneath her.

When the water came a foot deep into the lee scuppers, Ned looked at his father, who was at the helm; but this bubbling, hissing rush of sea over the sloping decks seemed a matter of no moment to anybody. The 'Jack and Lydia' held on with a welter of white at her bowspirt and a flood of water racing upon her deck far into the stormy bay. Then she tacked, and Arthur Michelmore roared to Ned to mind the main boom as it swung across over his cap. It touched him, but no more, and his father was concerned, and bade him keep awake. Then began the long, slow beat to the fishing-grounds, and the trawler pitched heavily with her head as near the wind as she could sail. Ned endured the ordeal well, and Michelmore the younger felt a secret disappointment that his successor had paid no toll.

"You'll never be sick," said William Gilberd; "you can swear to that. 'Tis a very fair dusting for a beginner, and you're Major all through. No Major was ever knowed to be sick at sea—eh, John?"

The skipper substantiated this fact.

"I didn't fear for him," he said. "He'll eat his meat, come presently, along with the best of us."

Now the boat went staggering on with a dry deck. She rose well to the sea on this tack, and Ned felt her lift like a feather over the mighty rollers. Above, the sails scarcely fluttered, thanks to the hand at the helm, but his father's skill was wasted on Ned as yet. He seemed to do nothing but hold the tiller.

William, however, drew his attention to what steering on this tack really meant. Ned was invited to take the helm a moment, and the 'Jack and Lydia' instantly behaved like a wilful steed weakly guided.

Ned set to work to peel potatoes presently and, by ill fortune, at a sudden staggering fall of the trawler's nose into a trough, slipped his knife and cut himself to the bone. It was his first sharp pang that day, but his father doctored the hand, stopped the blood flow, and explained that Stockholm tar might be trusted as a sure and safe medicament in all such cases. His hand bound up, Ned took the knife again and went on with greater care.

His wound ached less than his heart. Far away astern, the white water danced in a waving, spouting girdle about the shore, and soon the cliffs sank lower; while the red earth above them faded away. The ploughed lands signalled the last things that were good to Ned, and dimmed to grey shadows, their sanguine colour all sucked out by the magic of the wind. The hard silver mist of the north-easter shut down on the hills and valleys, and the solid things of his life were gone with the shore. There remained to him bare existence on the hateful sea.

So he felt then.

To the 'Scruff' for ray was the 'Jack and Lydia' bound. This submarine bank of shell and shingle extends east and west from Portland Bill to the south of Berry Head. Mr. Major knew his marks as no man knew them, and while to Ned the land seemed huddled to a mere colourless ghost, peering

fitfully, cloud-like, over the caps of the near waves, his father saw much more upon it and could tell where a tree clump, dwarfed now to a dot, fell into line with a lesser speck—a church tower on a cliff. He knew to a mile when the broken ground of the 'Scruff' stretched beneath the bottom of his boat, though his imagination had perhaps never pictured that strange, crepuscular world itself; he knew the ridge as well as he knew the way home; but his mind's eye had not seen his trawl-beam ploughing up that kingdom, or his net frightening before it or capturing the mingled population thereof.

The men had been making ready for a while, and Ned, having set the potatoes on a little stove in the cabin, went forward to talk with Mr. Gilberd, who was mending a small hole in the net.

"The new net be nearly ready, I hope," said William. "This here one's very near played out. It have seen eight months' work, and that be out of the common long—a very good life for a net."

"The new one's waiting at home," answered Ned.

Then John Major cried, "Down trawl, boys!" and the business of getting the great beam overboard in a rough sea began.

Ned stood aside to watch the younger Michelmore's part in this operation. Then he saw his chance and hastened unasked to lend a hand with the after bridle. His father, well pleased, shouted this order and that. The sails flapped and thundered; a wave broke over the boat. All was riot and confusion for a few moments. Two great ropes, the fore and after bridles, run twenty fathoms from the irons of the trawl-net and meet at the main mighty cable—a hundred and twenty fathoms long—that holds all. Now the great trawl-beam, nearly as long as the 'Jack and Lydia' herself, crashed into the sea, and Ned tumbled over the steam winch forward and barked his right shin from knee to ankle. The fleeting agony of it made him reel, but he picked himself up, and the men, not knowing that he had hurt himself,

laughed at the mishap. He knew that his father was watching all the time, so he laughed also, grinned with set teeth to hide his agony, and toiled away at the warp as it came crawling like a snake round the winch from below. The net was sent after the beam; the after iron of the great mass hove up astern for a moment; then the whole sank slowly, the bridles were swallowed up and the warp strained on the bulwark.

Then a great change seemed to come over the sea and the boat. Ned fancied that it had grown calmer as the pace moderated. The ketch skimmed along no more with lee scuppers awash, but steadied down, like a horse to the harrow. Another reef was taken in and the 'Jack and Lydia,' at trawling pace, began to drag her net over the 'Scruff.' Then came a time of rest.

"No tack for an hour," said John Major. "You'd best turn in, Arthur, and get forty winks."

He left the helm, which Gilberd took. Arthur Michelmore, who had an abscess in an aching tooth, went to his bunk; the skipper lighted his pipe and watched Harry and Ned make dinner ready.

"Now let's see how much your aunt have taught you," he said to his son.

A scrag of mutton and some onions were added to the potatoes, and Harry showed Ned the lockers, the place for salt and pepper, tea and bread. All drank tea in this boat, for the skipper was a fanatic upon the subject of liquor, and more than one good man had left the 'Jack and Lydia' because of it. Michelmore and Gilberd, however, had been with Mr. Major three years. Both professed the strongest opinions, and Arthur Michelmore practised them also; but Mr. Gilberd, in the profound seclusion of his home, permitted himself an occasional glass of spirits or pint of beer.

Presently John Major climbed on deck with Harry, and Ned was left in the silence of the cabin. He mixed the stew and boiled a kettle, while Arthur Michelmore snored in the bunk above him. He too went on deck presently, and watched the warp break-

ing out of the waves with a beard of foam for ever dripping from it. He listened to the noise it made as it ripped out of the rolling seas. There was something dreary and monotonous in the sound, and it added to his low spirits. The sea had spoken no friendly word to him that day, and he hated it as he had never hated it before. He felt greater peace of mind and body below, out of the sight and sound of it; therefore, down he went again to his cooking. His leg tormented him and now, looking at the injury, he found a raw red scrape from his knee half-way to the ankle, and a stocking blood-soaked. The sight depressed him still further. He decided that he must put on another stocking. He fetched down his canvas kit-bag and was opening it, when a sudden and violent lurch of the boat threw him head first at the stove. Ned thrust forward his hand to save his face, and burnt himself all over the palm of it. Then he fell back on the settle, throbbing and vibrating with pain and misery in body and in mind. He felt all the misfortunes of the world on his young shoulders. Wild, frantic thoughts seized him; fleeting indignation and even ferocity woke in his mild spirit. All things combined to torture him; he was baffled at each turn; even his resolution to behave like a man was crushed. The cursed boat and the cursed sea between them had knocked it out of him. For a few minutes Ned lost his nerve, and longed to rush on deck and fling himself into the water and have done with it. He cowered on the settle and wept and wrung his tormented hand.

"'Twill be the death of me," he sobbed to himself, "and the sooner the better."

Overhead feet tramped, and Arthur still snored in his bunk. Then a man darkened the ladder, and Ned strove to recover his self-possession. He was glad that Harry Michelmore and not his father had found him in this plight. Now the boy of seventeen comforted the boy of fourteen, yet not without some secret satisfaction at Ned's trouble.

"Ban't all beer and skittles—eh? You'll get your sea-legs come presently. Burned too? Dear, dear! Poor toad; you're catching it proper for a first day. Grease be the stuff for a burn. Things always come three to a time at sea; but 'tis bad luck as you've gone and done for t'other hand, for now you'm good for nothing."

Ned, however, declared that his hurts were not very great. Harry doctored him, and then told him to get out of the way on to a bunk while he served out the dinner.

The cabin was a marvel of much in little. Every hole and corner had something stowed in it, and all things were in their places. There were four bunks—two on each side. The cooking-stove stood forward, a clock ticked on the bulkhead.

Now young Michelmore looked at it, and said that dinner-time was come. The trawler had been on one tack for an hour, and all hands went on deck to shift the trawl. This elaborate business was watched by Ned, with all its apparent hopeless confusion of shifting sails and tangled ropes. Then the steady drag and lop began again, and all went below to dinner, save Harry Michelmore, who took the helm. Land was out of sight; one or two other trawlers worked five miles distant; a full-rigged ship with white sails went down Channel, snowy and grand against the grey.

They ate, and Gilberd praised Ned's cooking; but he could not take this commendation to himself.

"'Twas Harry did most," he declared. "I was throwed against the stove, and I've cut my leg too, and, when Harry came below, I was down on my luck, and had forgot all about the dinner for a bit."

They ate and drank; then Arthur and William went on deck, and Mr. Major was left with his son.

"'Twas the will of Providence, Ned, as you should sail for your first voyage in heavy weather. And so, as any landsman would, you've been knocked about a bit. But 'tis quite likely that you'll be months at

sea afore you scratch yourself again. 'Twill all come natural as the shore presently. I see signs that you'll be very handy afore long. And, of course, it must be so, for the sea's in your blood for generations. 'Twill be your second nature afore a year's out, because our line be born to sea as surely as men in general be born to sorrow."

Ned's heart told him that the sea and sorrow were one; but he did not say so.

"I'm going to do my level best at it, father," he answered, "though 'twill never come as second nature to me, I'm afraid, because I'm so terrible fond of the land and the ways of working it."

But John Major shook his head.

"That feeling will fade out of you," he declared. "You don't know nought about the sea yet, and when you do, you'll find 'tis far more to you than ever the shore can be, because of the race you spring from. I've seed it work in other seafaring families. Now and then there comes a sport, as takes to land work—I grant you that; but they be rare, and you ain't that sort, though you may think 'tis so for the moment. I'll hear you talk about the land when you know the sea, and not sooner. And don't you think we're always in rough water. 'Tis smooth oftener than not, and I've no fault to find with storms and losses, for they come in their appointed times and for the Lord's purpose, to remind us that life be life and not all fatness and prosperity. It ban't God A'mighty's purpose to make us out of conceit with Eternity, as of course we should be if this life was all we could wish to make it."

Ned felt the truth of these reflections. He had never been less out of conceit with Eternity in his own short life than during the past few hours. One thing was absolutely certain, and the Bible explicitly stated it: that there would be no more sea in heaven. Ned knew, however, that to his parent, this assurance was the most distressing within the covers of the Word.

CHAPTER VIII

After noon the wind moderated, the sun that had retired behind a dark haze broke out again, and threw a fret of gold upon the foam crests and of silver where the wind roughened the shadowed troughs of the waves. Ned watched Harry get up steam in the little winch-engine forward, because the time was come for bringing in the trawl. The result of five hours' dredging would now be known. But recovering the great beam and net was a weightier matter than casting them forth.

At four o'clock the 'Jack and Lydia' dropped her foresail, came up nose to wind, and began to wind in the trawl warp. Clink—clink—clink went the winch, and yard by yard the rope came home to the rise and fall of the boat. Then, when to Ned it seemed that a mile of warp must have run aboard, wound off the winch and slipped like a glittering snake below, the forehead of the trawl hove up through the green sea, and the beam soon appeared —white and glimmering with its image broken by the water. Tackle was waiting on the fore-halyard block, and as all hands bore upon it a merry clucking reminded Ned of the yard at Berry Farm, and the busy hens crowding and feeding there. Then from the water flashed the fore iron of the trawl, and the after iron was visible a minute later. They had gone into the sea rusty red; they emerged glittering like silver from the long hours of polishing on the shell and sand of the 'Scruff.'

The beam was made fast; beneath, the reticulations of the net shimmered black through the swinging foam and water, and sank away under it. The Michelmores and Gilberd donned tarpaulin

aprons lashed with yarn about their middles. Then they ranged along the bulwark, and began to get in the net.

Foot by foot it came glimmering out of the deep, bediamonded with running rows of drops, shining with rags and tags of red and green seaweed.

Mr. Major looked over the side and shook his head.

"Terrible dirty," he declared. "This ground wants cleaning cruel. Gaff the polk line, Ned, and help rig the bag rope."

Quickly the cod of the net rose gunwale high, like an enormous dripping sponge of matted weeds. Here and there in the midst the white belly of a fish gleamed silvery, jammed against the meshes. Then the bulging mass was dragged aboard; Gilberd threw off the cod line, and a downpour of mingled matter, dead and living, showered, slithered, spread, and streamed every way on the deck.

To Ned the things that belonged to humanity rather than the sea came first in interest. He shuddered at all the strange and gasping, creeping and crawling life that spread here. He was sorry for the creatures torn from the depths to die, because he hated death with the vague hate of youth, and his heart was naturally pitiful; but the man-of-war's fire bar, the scrubbing brush, the tarpaulin hat, the cake of soap, the boot, the clay pipe—these familiar things interested him. They belonged to the light, and they returned to the air again somehow richer and stranger for their sojourn under sea. The prey of the trawl declared itself; a legion of little brown and yellow crabs, like ants from a nest, began to thrust out of the mass and hurry sideways off in every direction. Horrors crawled here also—strange, nightmare things without faces, whose eyes were perched on stalks, whose ways and motions seemed awful to the mind that could not picture their propriety in their own environment.

Ned noted the monsters, and cried out that they

were hideous; but his father had wit to laugh at him.

"You'd look just so hideous to them, if you was at the bottom of the sea," he said.

Spider crabs and hermit crabs—red and green and grey—were here, with starfish, shells, eggs, and a swarm of useful things as yet too small to kill. A few fine plaice, brown and scarlet spotted, went into the first fish-box, and proved the pick of the venture. Then the men sorted two score of ray from the writhing heap. A heavy hake followed, and there emerged also some fluke, dabs, and rock ling. Hundreds of immature flat fish were shovelled up in the seaweed and returned to the sea.

Ned could not help much, but he used his injured hands as best he might to rescue the little crabs that had crawled to all manner of corners. Many had been crushed to death under the feet of the men, and the boy's sentimentality tortured him at the sight. He saved many small creatures, and his father watched him but made no comment.

William Gilberd offered Ned an uncommon spiny shell as a keepsake and memento of his first day at sea; and this he took for Deborah. Yet, as William scraped the pulpy mass of life out for him, the boy felt sorry that his pleasure in making the gift was marred by this death of the shell's first possessor. He strove the harder to rescue other lives, and when none was looking he dropped overboard two gigantic prawns which Arthur Michelmore had thrown to him from the heap.

But many of the frail, stranded creatures were dead before they returned to their element, and many had perished in their long drag over the bottom; and now the gulls, that came in a squalling storm after the boat and hurtled astern with wild flutter of wings, fed and fought over all this food.

John Major pointed out the fact to Ned.

"No call to mourn such a lot of killing," he said. "'Tis all quite proper and the Lord's work. Every

creature lives on life, and life comes out of death. All you eat has been alive once, whether 'tis bread, or green stuff, or butcher's meat, or a bit of fish. And the gulls have got to be fed by their Maker so well as every one else. He breeds the worm for the fish and the fish for the bird. I've thought these things out, you may be sure, Ned. You might fancy there was a lot of waste of life and a cruel deal of needless death made by the trawl as it works and grinds the sea bottom down under; but if you think that, you think wrong. The trawl brings food to countless scores of nameless creatures made for His own good reason by the Maker. The trawl tills up the bottom of the sea, like the plough turns up earth and lets in the frost to sweeten and the rain to make fat. All this the trawl does, and the more the fishing, the better the fish, as I always will hold to. So you can learn from me that us, in the 'Jack and Lydia,' be doing our proper share of the world's work, and slaying only what the Lord wants to be slayed, and catching only what the Lord wants to be catched."

While his father preached, Gilberd and Harry laughed at Ned and made the boat shipshape; Arthur set about cleaning the fish, and the gulls, on sun-rosy wings, came closer for their familiar meal, to justify John Major's argument that without death life cannot be.

Presently the trawl went down once more and was ploughing the 'Scruff' again as the sun sank upon his wide road to the west.

With darkness the wind died awhile and the fishermen knew that it might rest until dawn; but for once the untiring thing took little rest. It sprang up before midnight, shifted a point or two southerly, and blew as hard as ever.

Ned turned in and slept soundly enough until the sea grew rough again, and wakened him. Then he rose and got into his garments as best he could, while Gilberd and Michelmore descended to their sleep.

The boy went on deck to share the morning watch with his father. A waning moon hung red over the cloud-banks on the horizon; the dawn wind came chill. Lights glimmered and swung round about where other boats were working, and Ned was glad to see familiar stars above him; but they paled presently and dayspring whitened along the east. It promised well, then seemed to die again, smothered by clouds. The day hesitated to declare itself and Mr. Major, giving Ned the tiller, went below to look at the weather-glass.

When he returned on deck, father and son talked together of the dead and of the eternal life to which both believed that she had gone. The husband won a real but rare consolation in the picture of Lydia Major for ever at rest and for ever in joy; but Ned could not imagine it, and his own sorrow surged up in the still morning hour, dominated his mind, and rose greater than the picture of his mother's ceaseless happiness. The man, however, possessed a quality of faith great enough to see his wife in bliss and to keep that vision undimmed by any personal sense of the awful void in his own days. The logic of faith seldom attains any height so perfect. But since her happiness had ever been his first thought and care, there remained no room in his mind for sadness at his own plight, while he reflected on her absolute escape from suffering and her new state of perfection beyond the mind of man to conceive. Such was the power of his belief—a sort of faith once common when Crusaders fought and martyrs perished; but now winnowed away by the fierce winds of knowledge, whittled thin by the knife of proof. John Major's spirit was an anachronism and belonged to a period obsolescent in the history of man's mind. But the faith of his fathers still lived and moved and regulated his being, though the faith of his children was destined to be that dwarfer futility descended from the past giant: that feeble, emasculated rule feigned to regulate the conduct of christendom

to-day: that unreal shadow of a substance vanished for ever, and lifeless now as the perished fresco of a mediæval sanctity.

Presently Ned gave his father something of acute mundane interest to think about. Day waxed; the trawler's lights were extinguished; the time approached for emptying the net again.

Then young Major asked John what he thought of Sam Brokenshire.

"I don't think of him," answered the elder. "I'm sorry to the heart that his father ever got such a son. He deserved a better son, so far as man might say so. There's a kink in his strand, and I hope life may still set it right. He's young, and that's the only excuse I can bring up for him."

"I believe he's cruel fond of our Lydia," said Ned.

"Good powers! What do you tell me? I'd sooner—there! Who ever heard of such a foolish thing? And my Lydia her mother's daughter?"

"I seed them about a lot here and there; and I axed Lyddy what she thought of him, and she seemed a good bit niffed—regular cross she was—and told me to mind my own business."

"Young Brokenshire's a very fine man to the eye—the sort to take—but what be a child like you to talk about such things?"

"I'm sure 'tis natural for him to like Lydia," declared the boy. "Anybody might."

"Say no more," replied his father. "There's some things you remind me of. I'm both her parents to my girl from now. She must trust me—and—and—— But——"

This shadowy trouble occupied Mr. Major's thoughts and silenced him. He knew that his daughter was fair and would leave him presently; but he forgot the passage of the years and continued to regard that certain parting as a thing still remote. Now the shock of this news put the suitor out of his reckoning for a moment. Brokenshire, in any case,

was not to be thought of as a husband for Lydia; but a husband was to be thought of. A husband would soon come knocking at the door. His wife had gone; must another of the household vanish too? The man sighed to himself.

"A babby girl yesterday—and wife-old—wife-old now—ban't possible surely!"

He spoke aloud to himself and Ned heard him.

Then accident thrust the intruding thought of Brokenshire himself on the father's mind. Morning found the 'Jack and Lydia' off the Start; and as day lifted a cutter-rigged ketch on her trawl appeared five miles nearer the shore.

Gilberd and Arthur Michelmore were now on deck to get in the net, and it was William who marked the boat.

"Brokenshire's 'Night Hawk' terrible near the limits—as usual," he said.

"And she was on t'other side of 'em a few hours back along when 'twas dark," answered Michelmore. "You'll find him picking his way very clever among the crab-pots come most moonless nights, I reckon. Five and six pounds at a trawl he've got many a time since Christmas."

Ned looked at his father and the latter spoke.

"Of the two hundred and odd boats to Brixham, there ban't above half-a-dozen that poaches—perhaps not so many since Davy Mogg went to prison; for he've never gone there since. But still they've got to shut the Bay against honest men and punish all for a handful."

He looked across at the poacher, now sailing innocently outside the protected area, and shook his head.

The 'Night Hawk's' foresail fell.

"Ah," said Michelmore, "she'll draw it in free water; but where did she drop it?"

"Tumbledown Dick's sailed along with Sam for a few trips lately," said Ned. "Lydia told me that he had, because Billy Trust be laid by. I never knowed as Dick Varwell could do anything."

"Quite the contrary," answered Gilberd; "he can do everything. The cleverness oozes out of him; but he hates work like he hates soap and water. However, he's made a good few pounds the last fortnight."

"There'll be trouble for them all with the crabbers afore long," declared Arthur Michelmore. "They'm getting terrible restive and rash over it at Torcross and round about. They'll board Sam some dark night, and then there'll be broken heads."

"Us'll have made perhaps four pounds for two trawls by the look of it," said Gilberd; "and that rip over there will have got half as much again for one. Just the night for him 'twas."

Major marked the envy in the other's voice.

"Ill-gotten gains carry a high rate of interest, William," he said.

"Turbot and sole be turbot and sole notwithstanding," murmured Mr. Gilberd, but not for his skipper's ear.

The 'Jack and Lydia' having steam, was quicker with her trawl than Brokenshire's boat. The last haul was made, and William's estimate of the probable market value confirmed by Mr. Major. But John never prophesied, nor was it wise, as none afloat could guess what fish had gone into the harbour before them. Now Ned was homeward bound, and as they came back into the bay, the 'Night Hawk,' in full sail with foam flying and the decks awash, caught the bigger ketch and passed her.

"How he do carry on, that man!" said young Michelmore. "He'll shipwreck his boat some day. Yes, there's Tumbledown Dick aboard of her sure enough."

Ragged as a moulting sea-gull, with his pipe in his mouth, and his legs drawn up out of the water, sat Varwell aft beside the steersman. He waved a hand to Ned as the 'Night Hawk' forged past and hastened to her anchorage. She was at moorings under the breakwater before the 'Jack and Lydia'

arrived, but some delay followed aboard her, and so it chanced that the two dinghies were launched simultaneously, and soon drove oar to oar, as they were paddled in between the harbour heads. Here there fell a collision and shock—not between the boats, but the opinions of those that came to land in them.

Ned, however, had no thoughts for anything but home. Brixham never looked so fair to him before. He saw the lines of slant roofs glittering under the sun, all veiled in mist of morning fires that softened many an outline. Clothes on drying lines fluttered like flags and made merry movement aloft. The world of little windows glistened tier on tier to the sky's edge and the water's edge. In harbour the boats with flapping sails sent great streaks and streamers of orange light over the water. Ned noted the familiar names and found a magic and meaning in them never guessed till now. The 'Sweet Home'—how much that meant to-day; the 'Faithful,' the 'Provider,' the 'Courage,' the 'Bread-Winner,' the 'Try It,' the 'Pilgrim,' the 'Smiling Morn,' the 'Antelope,' the 'Brown Mouse,' the Victorious'—these had all arrived, and others foamed behind soon to return. A risen sun glowed on the land's welcoming face for Ned; it flushed and warmed all things, his heart among the rest. The conditions were almost identical with those in which he had departed four-and-twenty hours before; but his spirit transformed them. He looked afar while light wakened on the distant hills; he marked the green of larches and a verdant bloom where corn was breaking the earth. And presently, upon the quay, he saw the small shape of Deborah Honeywill, standing by King William's statue. He had forgotten her promise to come down and meet him when he returned; but she had not forgotten; and here she was—a little drab thing in a blue sun-bonnet at the foot of the lofty lump of marble.

Meanwhile, thanks to the exuberance of Tumble-down Dick, words passed between the boats.

"Good morning to you, Mr. Major!" he shouted. "No doubt you're a bit astonished to find me among the wonders of the deep. I hope you haven't come empty-handed. Me and Sam here have done wonderful well—all high-priced fish, strange to say! And only in one haul!"

John Major did not reply, but Gilberd made answer.

"How's that?" he asked. "'Tis different to what we've got."

Dick shrugged his shoulders.

"No doubt the Lord looks after His own," he said—a reply that proved too much for the skipper of the 'Jack and Lydia.'

"You Godless rascal!" he shouted out. "And you so ready to take the Name in vain. Will nought lift you to better manners and better ways? If you'd open your mouth less and your Bible more, there might be hope even for you; but you talk treason on every subject and look into the truth of none. You sit in the sun at the street corner, or go drinking with any who'll offer you a drink, and say what God do and what He don't do, and what He ought to do and ought not to do, and think your drunken dreams are wisdom and your loose opinions sense. Even when you work, 'tis not honest work, for well you know where you were trawling last night."

Mr. Varwell, in no way annoyed, laughed and retorted; but Sam Brokenshire held his peace, for Lydia's father was the last person he desired to quarrel with at this season.

"We can't all think alike, master," said Dick. "Many men, many opinions; but charity's a sheet anchor none can sail without. That's where you ban't in it with me and Sam here. Lord bless your life, that charitable we are that when we ran into some crabbers' pots—right out in mid-ocean, you might say—did we cuss and cut all adrift? Not us; we stopped and cleared though we lost an hour by it. 'No doubt the poor fool's got a wife and children,' said Sam here. 'We won't hurt him.' That's live

religion, Mister Major, and I'm sure you'd have done no less. But there!" concluded Dick as the boat's nose bumped the steps, "of course what you don't know about religion ban't worth knowing. Only this you mightn't know, perhaps: that 'tis a matter of fit, like clothes. If this sort or that sort fits your mind, well and good; if not, you might as well go naked for it. You might just as well offer a ploughman this here oar for a spade as thrust your pattern of prayers upon a chap that can't stomach 'em."

"You'll live to know wiser, I hope, for your own sake," answered the elder man. "And as for charity, every rascal nowadays hides under the cloak of it. There's only one truth and there's only one true religion that teaches it; 'tis us that have got to bend to that and not fling it over and seek a new thing, because the truth bruises our stiff backs at the first. And, good or evil, right well you know, Richard Varwell, that your life's a bad argument for your opinions and a shame to the nation as well."

The men landed. Dick and the owner of the 'Night Hawk' carried a basket of fine soles and some heavy turbot ashore; the crew of John Major's boat began flinging ray on to the half-way platform of the steps, where stood a man to receive them.

CHAPTER IX

A GRIM, blood-bespattered man with a pronged fork, stabbed one by one, or two by two, the great ray, and hurled them aloft over his head on to the quay. Here they lay in a slithering pink and white mass, and presently Ned and Harry set to work to arrange them. The choicer fish were also spread, and John Major's catch came to auction. A dozen buyers assembled about it; a shambling salesman—one Mr. Memery—appeared, book in hand. He was bearded, grizzled, shabby and round-shouldered. He cast a lack-lustre eye upon the fish. Then he opened a corner of his mouth, but not the whole of it, and croaked out his news like a corncrake.

"Here you are! Here you are—a dozen fine ray—very fine ray! What price for these fine ray?"

The sale proceeded like magic, for despite his dim eyes and drooping head, the salesman marked the buyers. Ned marvelled, for he saw no exchange of signs and heard no sound save the croaking of Mr. Memery; but that practised worthy knew by the movement of a finger, the turn of a head, the lift of an eyebrow when his price had gone up.

"One pound for these fine ray—one pound—one pound, one pound—one pound for these ray! One pound, two; one, three; one, four—one four, one four for these ray. Where's Tim Blake? He'd not mess about at this money. One, four; one, four; one pound five for these ray."

A woman watching the sale, without personal interest in it, sighed in an abstract way and addressed anybody who might listen.

"Ah! rays be going down something cruel. They'll never fetch what they did no more," she said.

Mr. Gilberd, who was at her elbow, made answer:

"No, ma'am; and more won't nothing else out of the sea ever fetch what it did. Everything's going to the dogs along of Free Trade."

Meantime Mr. Memery grated on.

"One pound, six; one pound, six; one, six for these fine ray; going for one, six; one, six, six; one, six, six, for these ray; going for one, six, six; going for one, six, six; going—going—last chance—going for one, six, six—gone! Truscott."

Ned stared. Mr. Truscott had been standing on the pavement several yards away from the ring of buyers; yet by some mysterious telegraphy he had communicated with this bent, dim-eyed corncrake of a man, who conducted the sale. Now the purchaser came forward and affixed his note to the ray, so that the giant of the catch reposed amidst the corpses of his lesser kindred with the respected name of 'Truscott' printed across a scarlet label upon his white abdomen. Boxes of pounded ice appeared and the ray soon vanished to make room for others.

The 'Jack and Lydia's' better fish were next disposed of, and fetched fair prices. All had been sold in five minutes, and Ned learned that his first trip afloat represented in money the sum of four pounds, five shillings, and sixpence. It seemed an enormous figure to him and only sank a little before the fact that Sam Brokenshire's soles and turbot brought nearly three pounds more. Another salesman disposed of these, and Ned watched and heard some jokes, and saw a few men frown and scowl at the successful trawlers. Mr. Varwell was more than a match for them, however; and Ned perceived that at market, the question was not where a fish had come from, but its value.

"You see," said Tumbledown Dick, winking at Ned, when his father had passed beyond hearing,

"the harvest of the sole can be gathered a thought nearer than Lundy, if Providence is on a poor fisherman's side!"

And then, peeping from behind the men, where she had waited long, Ned saw Deborah and shouldered to her and rolled with a fine sea gait along the quay at her side.

She cried out at his black face and injured hands; but he said it was the steam winch that had made him so dirty, and declared that his wounds, though deep and tremendous, were in a fair way to heal again. She consoled him and made much of him. A few older sailor boys joked at the sight of the ingenuous Ned and a girl; but he did not note or hear them. Deborah had brought him a little bunch of primroses, and the scent of them was heaven in the lad's nostrils.

"I never knowed afore how sweet primrosen could smell," declared he.

Lydia greeted her brother with congratulations, while his aunt, gloomily rejoicing that her predictions of disaster had been fulfilled and the historic ill-fortune of the family maintained, dressed his wounded hands and doubted whether the burned one would ever heal again. Two days of rest now awaited Ned; for, in consideration of his injuries, Mr. Major let him off certain necessary work to be done on the 'Jack and Lydia' before she sailed again.

A long afternoon the boy spent at Berry Farm, and Tom Honeywill felt the spirit of envy scorch him as Ned told of his adventures on the sea. The children walked together in the lanes, and young Major related his experiences and the lore gleaned from his father and the men.

"Trawling be good for fishing—so Mr. Gilberd says. The more you scratch up the bottom of the sea, the more food there is for the fish, and the more they come, and the bigger they grow. 'Tis like ploughing land. And another terrible interesting thing is that the poor fish have their ways and ideas

just the same as us. Some be foolish and some be clever."

"I didn't know as they'd got any brains at all," said Deborah.

"More didn't I; but they have—some of 'em. A dog-fish haven't, and a hake haven't, but some of they flat-fish be cruel clever. A sole's so cunning as a hawk, if you'll believe it!"

Tom laughed.

"You won't make game of me with that stuff, so you needn't think to," he declared.

"Wish I may die if it ban't true!" answered the other earnestly. "You'd never guess it to look at 'em—for their faces be silly, sure enough—along of them having both eyes on one side; but they take an awful deal of catching—terrible driving fish they be, and they'll nose and wiggle into every corner of the cod, and fight to their dying hour to escape. Even the little young soles us brought up would squirm off into every hole and corner, and work along deck faster than the crabs, to find their way back to sea."

"I hope you put 'em back," said Deborah.

"Scores of 'em, Deb. The men laughed at me; but if I seed a creature anywheres about fighting for its life, I couldn't help picking it up and heaving it back. Some I was most feared to touch, for there be terrible queer, evil-looking things come up from the 'Scruff.' Still, though they was horrid to look at, you could see very clear as they all liked being alive, and wanted to keep alive terrible bad. And, as father said, if they looked nasty to us, what must we have looked to them?"

"I lay you didn't drag up nothing finer than them things at the 'Sailor's Knot,'" declared Tom. "But, all the same, next time you go, I do hope as you'll fetch back some of they beasts for me. I should like to have 'em stuck up all over the walls in my sleeping-place."

"You'd never sleep a wink for 'em," answered Ned; but the other boy scoffed at this prophecy.

"You'm so soft," he answered. "You couldn't even go to sea as 'twas, without knocking yourself about and wounding yourself, as if you was a girl. If I'd gone, I lay I shouldn't have chopped my fingers or fallen against the stove."

"Perhaps you wouldn't," answered Ned mildly; but Deborah could not stand this, and she rated Tom with some warmth.

"You silly, fat thing!" she cried. "As if you'd have done half so well as Ned! You know what you are. Why, in them great waves, you'd have been rolling about that ill that you'd have been no more use than a pig. And Ned never turned a hair, and he even cooked the dinner. I'd like to have seen you do that!"

Tom sobered down.

"'Tis a gert gift not to be sick," he admitted; "and I'll grant you I should have been pretty queer at the start; but I'd have very soon got over it, and if Ned have larned to cook, so could I."

"No doubt you could," answered the other boy, in his usual peace-loving fashion.

Then he vouchsafed more knowledge.

"When Venus be chasing the moon and the tide's running—then is the properest time for dabs, so Arthur Michelmore says. And, for his part, he declares that he'd sooner have a good large dab even than a sole or brill. That's his taste; and Gilberd says he's for a plaice afore any fish that ever came out of the sea; and his wife says the same. Flat-fish in general run in veins under the water, and if you have the luck to fetch the trawl into a vein, you'll catch more fish in an hour than you might catch in a tide another time. But we didn't hit no vein. 'Tis just good luck, and don't often happen."

"I wish terrible often as your father would let me go for a voyage—just once," burst out Tom. "'Twould be a very gert thing for me, and I'd be so handy as I knew how. I be sick for my life of the land,

and if there's one thing I hate more than another 'tis shedding out manure over the turnip seed, and tramping back and forward on the fields, and looking out at the sea, same as I've been doing of late."

"Curious," answered the other. "And here's me, as would a lot sooner look out at the sea than be on it any day of the week."

"I've got a mighty fine lot of gulls' eggs, however," continued Tom, "and I had a pretty fair adventure under the Head, for a masterpiece of a bird—largest ever I seed—comed so close in his rage that he flipped my hat off with his wing! I seed the glare in his eye, and he chittered at me proper, and used the worst bird-language that he knowed. And if I'd been flustered, down I should have gone and been dashed to a million pieces without doubt. But I was a match for him. 'You've took my cap,' I says to him, 'so be damned if I won't take all your eggs!' And I did, and then crawled back and left him in a proper tear."

"'Twas a very wrong thing," replied Ned, "and if you understood about the gulls and their usefulness you wouldn't have gone for to do it."

"The eggs be useful for my mother's breaksis, so I shall go on getting 'em till they'm all hard set," retorted Tom.

Then Ned told about the ways of the birds at sea.

"Clever ban't the word for them," he declared. "They bide patient in the water till the cod of the net's aboard; then they know to the minute when 'tis their turn, and they rise up and hang aloft ready to pounce upon the stuff. And sometimes you'll see 'em fighting over the fish, head and tail, like dragons."

"A cruel fine sight, and I'd give all I've got in the world to see such things," sighed Tom.

CHAPTER X

THUNDER rain fell heavily, and a past storm still growled over the sea; yet weather gleams were breaking out of the west, and soon the grey lightened to silver, and the silver fretted away and showed a tattered scrap of sky.

"At last!" said Mr. Brokenshire. "There's blue enough to make a sunbonnet for 'e now, my dinky dear, so we'd best to get homeward afore it comes again."

A thunderstorm had broken and soaked the way by which Lydia Major and her lover passed an hour before. In the deep woods by Dart they had secretly wandered; and Lydia felt a little frightened, yet fluttered with joy, at these stolen hours spent in Sam's company; while the fisherman was triumphant.

Now they tramped homeward, and talked of a great thing to be done when next the 'Jack and Lydia' came from sea.

"Father's going round land pretty soon," explained Lydia. "He'll be away for a month very likely if the North Channel's still fishing well."

"But I can't wait no more till I hear his answer."

"I know his answer," said the girl gloomily.

"No, you don't. I'll promise anything—and perform it, too. He's got no fair ground against me."

"Start Bay."

"All nonsense. What's Start Bay against a hundred pound in the bank and my own boat?"

"Is it yours?"

"Honour bright. There's not a rope mortgaged. On Sunday afternoon I shall fetch along, and my tongue's been a good friend to me afore now, and I

hope to God it will be again. D'you know what stands to me for more hope than ought else? You, Lyddy. Can a big-hearted man like your father say 'no' to you? Never!"

But she knew more of Mr. Major's views than her lover, and felt very far from sanguine.

"'Tis all duty with father, remember. He loves me very well, and thinks a lot of me, and does many and many a kind, fatherly thing. And I'm more and more to him since my mother died, though he doesn't hold with many of the things I learned at school, and says the world's a school that will soon show me how much I learned wrong. But he's got very hard and fast ideas about young men, and 'tis no good pretending that he's friendly to you, for he isn't, Sam."

"I'll make him."

She shook her head, and presently, without the radius of Brixham windows, they parted, in a sequestered place. Lydia returned home, and Brokenshire, who proposed to visit Start Bay that night, went down to the harbour. He had been doing well, and fortune fooled him into a little carelessness, for after many satisfactory trips there came now a failure.

Trawling at two in the morning off Tor Cross with lights out, the 'Night Hawk' fouled some crab pots, and did a great deal of mischief in a very few minutes. Then, two nights later, Sam went to the Bay again, and had the misfortune to be found by a boat that was on the look out for him.

The weather failed him. It changed unexpectedly, and a breeze that should have held all night did no such thing; and between two and three o'clock in the morning a waning moon revealed the 'Night Hawk' as a black silhouette on a bright sea nearly two miles nearer the shore than she had any business to be. Long grey beaches stretched northerly, and within them a sheet of silver marked Slapton Ley and the sedges whispering there; while beyond rose

up the thickening heads of elm-trees and swelled a line of low hills.

Sam and his mates, Billy Trust and Saul Mutter, viewed this unexpected change with some concern. The poachers were about to get home their trawl and work to sea as fast as the wind would let them, when necessity arose for more urgent measures.

"Be damned if they ban't putting off!" cried Mr. Mutter. He was a little black man, almost dwarfed, but famed for his strength and bull-dog courage. His record was vague, and he had not dwelt long at Brixham.

"They'll board us in twenty minutes!" added Trust.

A boat rasped on the distant shingle, and so still had grown the night that the sound of her launching came clearly over the sea.

Sam sniffed, and the pirate in him rejoiced, but the lover's heart sank.

"Couldn't have come at a worse moment for me; but there's a good chance to get out of it yet. They don't know you, Mutter, so you'd best to face 'em. Buoy the trawl and let it go. There's no time to get it. And I'll do the rest."

They worked hard yet with method, as though these sudden operations were not unfamiliar. Billy Trust fastened a buoy to the trawl-warp and flung it overboard; Sam lighted the port and starboard lanterns, then fetched a piece of wood on which in white letters and figures were painted a trawler's number. This lie he hung over the bow and made fast above the real number of his boat. Next, with Mutter's help, he lowered the mainsail on which the true number also appeared, and to hooks let into the sail for this purpose, Sam hung a square of tanned canvas also carrying the false number and covering the true. The sail was up and Sam had disappeared before the boat laden with five angry crabbers came alongside.

Brokenshire now stood hidden on the companion ladder leading down to his cabin. Trust went forward and concealed himself in the shadow of the foresail, while Mr. Mutter stood at the helm. He was disguised with a heavy false beard, carried for such an event as this.

"Who are you?" cried a voice from the stern sheets of the boat.

"Use your eyes and find out," answered Saul gruffly. His purpose was to suggest an angry man in trouble, and indeed this was not far from the fact.

A lantern flashed from the shore boat, and in its blaze the 'Night Hawk' stood sharply forth. The light swept over it; then settled on Mr. Mutter's face.

"What are you doing in here?"

"Going home, I should think. I don't live among you mangy crabbers."

"Where's your trawl?"

"At the bottom of the blasted sea two miles south of the Start. Better go and find it."

The men in the boat murmured together; Mutter preserved a sulky silence; the trawler crept on her way, and Sam grinned out of sight.

A few strokes and the boat was beside the 'Night Hawk' again. Her lantern ranged over the mainsail and the bows. The false number was noted.

"I want your name, please," said the skipper of the boat.

"Jeremiah Wilson, 9, Overgang, Brixham, Master of the 'Silver Star,' Number nought one two seven. Is there anything else you want?"

Still the man in the boat doubted.

"If 'tis a false number, you know the penalty," he said.

"Go to hell and find the true one, then," answered Saul Mutter with fine fury. "Ban't it enough for a man to lose his trawl without being blackguarded

by a lot of longshore sweeps that feed and fatten in this way, where better men ought to be allowed to fish?"

High words passed; then the boat fell away and presently she vanished.

Sam roared with laughter, and debated tacking for the trawl; but it was too light and dawn had already broken.

"I know where 'tis to a hair," declared Mr. Trust; "but I can't swear to the place unless there's a blink of light enough to see the marks."

"We'll come back to-morrow night and hope for luck," answered Sam; "and till then we must run south out of the way. We can't go home without the trawl. Sorry to be out of hearing too, for those cheerful toads will send a policeman to call at No. 9, Overgang, I reckon; and they'll find that Mr. Wilson's like number nought one two seven—not very generally known!"

They stood to sea when beyond the vision of the crabbers, and before morning were out of sight of land. Not until dark did they creep back again; and fickle Fortune now relented and served their purpose with a clear but dark night. Before the moon rose Trust had picked up his marks with amazing accuracy. The Start lighthouse was one; a rock off the mainland beneath it was another; while these, taken with a bluff above a village and a church spire in line, brought the 'Night Hawk' to the desired spot. They anchored then, put out their boat, and worked with a leaded line from the trawler to the dinghy till they struck the little barrel buoy, where it floated submerged on the trawl-warp two feet under water.

In half an hour the 'Night Hawk' was trawling steadily; but long before the late moon rose and lit a burning hearth on the edge of the sea, the poacher had vanished.

"It might be a good thing to give the Bay a bit of a rest now," said Mutter. And Sam agreed with him.

"Us shan't be there for a month or more," he promised. "I've got other fish to fry for a bit. Come Sunday I'm going up over to ax Major to let me marry his darter."

"Should never have thought you could sink to be such a hopeful fool," answered Billy Trust. "Still everybody's got their weak spot and the girls was always yours. However, the answer won't take holy John very long."

But Mr. Brokenshire's sanguine spirit could not be easily discouraged.

"Reason is reason," he answered; "and whatever else John Major may be, he's always got the name of a man that listens to reason. I've a lot of cast iron facts for him, and nobody can get round money in the bank."

"And you can't get round where most of the money came from," answered Billy; "and what's more, you won't get him round it neither."

Sam shrugged his shoulders.

"I hope you're wrong there; but, whether or no, there's other ways of getting a thing besides axing for it."

"That's true," admitted his mate; "and if me and you don't know it, who should?"

CHAPTER XI

Mr. Brokenshire made an unusual toilette when the Sunday of his great adventure ashore arrived. His cheeks were shining with soap, his curls with pomatum. He wore Sunday black, a hard hat, and a linen shirt. Prosperity reigned about him, and his handsome face won many a sly and admiring glance as he proceeded from his cottage at Overgang to the home of Lydia.

Chance threw him upon Tumbledown Dick hard by the statue of King William. The quay was silent and quiet, for the hour of Sunday dinner had not yet passed, though it was waning.

"Ah!" said Dick, "flourishing like the green bay tree, I see. A pity you wasn't home yesterday morning. 'Twas very interesting. Two of they poor crabbers from Tor Cross and a policeman came to Overgang to find a gentleman by the name of Jeremiah Wilson; but nobody had ever heard of him seemingly. All they could tell was that he had a black beard and a brave assortment of crooked words. But, as I said to the policeman, 'there's a score of fishermen in Brixham that would answer to that!' Then they came down to hear tell about a cutter-rigged ketch called the 'Silver Star.' But, strange to say, none hadn't heard of her either—not under that name."

Sam told Mr. Varwell the truth, and Dick regretted that he had not been aboard at the time to enjoy the experience.

Then Brokenshire announced his news.

"I'm off to tackle John Major about my girl. And I hope he hasn't heard this yarn from Start Bay;

because he's got his knife in me already, and I'm afraid he'll be too likely to think I was the party."

"Bluff it," answered Dick. "You'll often surprise a man if you take for granted a thing he meant to refuse. Don't go begging and scraping to Major, like a beggar praying for a meal. Come afore him as an equal and a prosperous chap, as good as him. Carry it with a high hand. None could do it better."

Sam nodded.

"That's proper advice, I do believe," he said.

"Why, of course. Don't you always have the cream of my sense? Be bold as brass; march to the man with flags flying and drums beating. Don't go wanting him to be so kind as to let you marry his daughter; but tell him you're going to be so good as to do it, and ask him if she's to have three figures of his savings or only two."

Mr. Brokenshire laughed till neighbouring seagulls rose in alarm and fluttered further off.

"A fine thought without a doubt, though I'm afraid he's not the kind to be swept off his legs that way. But the hint is like to help for a start."

"You never know. Be it as 'twill, I'll come in and have a bit of supper with you, if you please, and hear how it goes. I was asked to pick a bone with the Mayor of Torquay to-night, but declined the invitation owing to my principles."

"Come and welcome," said Sam. "And if the old boy's contrary, I can tell you what I shall do next."

The lover went forward and left Tumbledown Dick singing his famous and only song. There was none to hear but the birds; yet he warbled with his usual gusto while he swung on the pier chain.

> "Three things will be scratching,
> I'll tell you if I can:
> A cat, a brier and a woman.
> Though 'tis my delight both night and day
> To praise the women so much as I may."

Ten minutes later Sam knocked at the door of Mr. Major's dwelling, and the fisherman, who had just taken off his coat to smoke in greater comfort, put it on again, while Ned answered the knock.

He stared at sight of Mr. Brokenshire, yet guessed at his reason for being here. Lydia was gone for the day to friends at Paignton, and now her brother perceived why she had done so.

Sam winked.

"Father home?" he asked.

"Yes, Mr. Brokenshire."

"Call me Sam; you'm a sailor now and so good as any of us. Arthur Michelmore tells me you be getting very handy in the boat already."

"Very kind to say it, I'm sure. This here's the parlour. Father's smoking in the kitchen."

"I'd sooner come there and smoke also, if 'tis all the same to him."

But it was not. Mr. Major granted to the suitor none of that friendly and familiar intercourse which pipe and kitchen and shirt-sleeves may be supposed to represent. Instead he kept Sam waiting for five minutes in the parlour while he donned his coat, put down his pipe, and buttoned and braced himself for the coming encounter. The old man guessed what was about to happen and so did his sister, Mrs. Michelmore. She was washing up in a scullery adjoining the kitchen and heard Ned announce the visitor.

"Mark me," she said, "that chap have come after our Lydia. 'Tis all explained—her lack-a-daisy way of late—even off her precious books she've been. And him to find her out—the biggest rascal in Brixham by all accounts. Just the family luck—and her mother took at the time a girl most wants a mother. And, as for me, I might so soon tell to the wall as advise. But what do a man know of their cunning ways to fox them in authority over them?"

She whined on until her nephew stopped her.

"Father's gone," said Ned from the kitchen.

Mr. Major was indeed already in the company of Sam. When he entered, the younger offered his hand and John took it; but the start was not hopeful.

"For the sake of your dead father I shake your hand, Samuel, not for your own," began John Major. "And now please sit down in thicky chair and tell me what you want of me in so few a words as possible."

"I don't know why for you should speak so short," answered the other; "and I don't see why you should deny to me what you granted to my father. I'm a plain-dealing, hard-working man, and I thought that I hadn't got an enemy in Brixham, or anywhere else. But I'll leave that. So soon as you know me better, Mr. Major, you'll like me better, I hope; and if you don't the fault shan't be with me."

"I don't want to know you better—not as you are. But that's your own fault, Samuel, not mine."

"Well, I can't guess what you've got against me, and if anybody have been telling lies, that's no reason why such a man as you—a head and shoulders above us all in goodness—should believe 'em. But, as to knowing me better, that you must do, so far as I can see; and I hope when you do, you'll find that I have been misjudged."

"I should be very glad to find it so. And now tell me what you're here about," answered John.

"With a message, you might say. A message from your own daughter. Girl-like, before a big happening she couldn't bring her lips to tell you. Nothing would do but I must myself. And I'm sure, Mr. Major, I'm a proud man to do it. And I hope you'll be so pleased as us. In a word, we'm tokened. You know how these things fall out. You was married yourself. We'm made for each other, I'm sure, and though 'tis a bad turn to take such a daughter away from you, yet so it happens all the world over."

"You dare to sit here in my house—in my chair—and tell this stuff?"

"'Dare'? That's a hard word! Of course I dare.

Why shouldn't I dare? If I've got your daughter to promise to marry me, which I have done—and she's your sort and won't go from her word neither—if I've had the luck to win such a girl, why should I be feared or over-daring to tell it again? I'm terrible proud of it, and so's she. And between you and me—as between man and man—there's no question of daring or fearing."

"Go on," said Mr. Major; "finish what you've got to say, Samuel, and then hear me."

"Well, naturally I want a bit of news for mine. I'm going to marry Lydia, and proud I am to think so, and I'm here to tell you that I've got a hundred and thirty pounds in the bank and a boat that no man can claim a timber of. You know how many can say as much. Well, I thought when you heard the good news, that you might be inclined to open your mouth a bit too—as became a father surely. She's been a very good darter to you, as all the world knows, and you're snug, so I should guess you might give her three figures for my three. Or perhaps 'twould please you better to help us with the new furniture? I leave all that to you; but I only wanted to find you in a friendly spirit, as became the news, and leave you in a still friendlier one, when you'd heard all about it. That's all I've got to say, and there's not a word from first to last that you've got a right to quarrel with, if you're a fair-minded man."

For some moments Mr. Major merely regarded Sam without speaking. The lover therefore added a word.

"I know you're going round land o' Tuesday, so I thought as this might be a very good minute to mention the matter. You'd have time to turn it over in your mind while you're away in the North Channel."

"As for that," began the elder at length; "as for that, Samuel, there's no need to turn it over. I knew your father, him as went down off Portland, and a better man, and a man more ready to meet his God

of a sudden, I never did know; and I knowed your man-of-war uncle, as was drowned when the 'Eurydice' capsized—a good man too. But you're different—and very different. You didn't have them for models, worse luck, because you was only a young youth when they died. Now thus it is: I believe in my fellow-creatures, Samuel—you among the rest. The Lord wouldn't have saved you, when He drowned your father, if He hadn't had work for you to do in the world. Michael Brokenshire's work was done, and well done, when he went out of it; for though still a man under middle age, the length of the thread be no business of ours; but only the spinning. He spun true. But you—what be you spinning? When be you going to do what you was born to do?"

"A fair question and I'm glad I can give a fair answer," replied Sam. "I'm working in my father's steps and winning my way against odds, for you know well there's too many boats in Brixham fleet and too many women and children depending on 'em. I'm doing my work and saving money. And what more can I do?"

"I'll tell you. You can go straight. Ban't for me to preach to you—'tisn't my business; but you can give ear to them whose business it is. You can go to the Lord's House, which you never do; you can keep the eighth commandment, which you're a deal too fond of breaking. And until you do these things, and make your peace with your Maker, and show me that you're a changed man in them particulars of honesty and religion, I'll have nought more to say to you. Mend your ways and don't turn your mind to marrying my daughter or any other honest girl, till you're honest yourself."

"I never heard better advice, Mr. Major," answered Sam; "and the only thing the matter with it, in my case, is that 'twasn't called for. No man can prove that I've ever dropped my trawl a yard inside the limits in Start Bay or elsewhere, and so long as none

can prove it and I deny it, not you nor another has a right to bring it up against me, or believe it. As to church-going, if you'll let me have Lydia, I'll become so regular a church member from to-day onwards as you are yourself. No doubt 'twould be a very good thing for me, and I'm quite willing to meet you there."

"Don't think to throw dust in my eyes," answered the other sternly. "I'm ashamed of you that you can lie, here on the Lord's Day, with such a glib and easy tongue. No man has seen you poaching, perhaps; but right well you know your Maker has; and man can see the fish. We're not fools—to be deceived by you and hoodwinked in this matter. 'Tis evil—evil every way—an improper and dishonest thing. None be more for the opening of the Bay than I am; but law's law, and the law of the land says 'no'; and, what is more, the people responsible have made it very clear that, until you and the likes of you give up this fishing there, the Bay won't be opened again. False numbers have been shown only last week there, and false names given; and each case puts back our hope of having the Bay again."

"The politics of the Bay don't matter then, as we shan't agree about that, master; but I'll come back to my question. Will you let me marry your daughter if I settle one hundred pound and my boat upon her?"

"No, I will not."

"Why not?"

"Because your manner of life be up against everything I think clean and honest and proper and God-fearing."

"'Tis 'no,' then, without a loophole? Can't you think of her so well as me?"

"'Tis of her I do think. I've heard nothing of her side. But I take it for granted that she's fond of you."

"That she is, and I'd sell my soul for her, Mr. Major."

"A silly speech and a wicked. That's the sort of easy, evil thing, the likes of you say without thinking what it means. 'Tis for you to save your soul, not to sell it. You say 'no loophole.' That's the point. Be you in earnest, or ban't you? I don't want to do injustice to you or wrong to my child. 'Tis for the old to teach patience and justice to the young; for if you can't learn from us, where shall you learn? I say this: Come back to me about Lydia in a year—a full year from now. And, in the meantime, show if you're in earnest. I promise nought, mind. I'll bind myself to nothing at all; but I'll watch the pair of you and see what this talk be worth and what you be worth. There's your loophole, Samuel, and you can take it or leave it. That's all I can say. You do your part and I'll do mine."

Mr. Brokenshire reflected.

"Make it six months and it's a bargain," he said at last.

"I've spoken and generously. 'Tis no sign of hope in you that you should seek to chaffer. A year's all too little."

"I wanted Lydia by midsummer."

Mr. Major rose.

"You needn't keep me no longer," he answered, "and I won't keep you. 'Tisn't many men as would have been so patient with you as I have, and I say again that 'tis more for your dead father's sake than yours that I've been at the trouble to talk reason to you. But your sort won't hear reason: you must go out in the world and dance your own fool's dance till reason falls like a scourge on your backs. Be off with you, and don't you pay any more attention to my daughter, because I forbid it."

"Let's split the difference and say nine months," suggested Sam.

He preserved a perfect temper through Mr. Major's reproof.

"Go," answered the elder. "And let me hear no more of this."

"Say nine months, and I'll start church worship this very evening."

"Go!" repeated Mr. Major.

"I can't go yet; I——"

"Then I will," said John.

He rose and left the lover alone.

Sam reflected a moment, then he departed. He went down to the 'Sailor's Knot,' drank a pint of beer, laughed and chaffed with a dozen fishermen and exhibited the best of spirits. Then he set off to Churston, for it was arranged between him and Lydia that she should walk back from Paignton and that Sam should meet her on the way.

Mr. Major, meanwhile, received another visitor, and while his mind revolved upon the coming grief of his daughter, he found himself confronted with the present tribulations of his son.

William Gilberd it was who called upon his skipper —out of a large kindness for youth. During the past few voyages he had watched Ned only less closely than his father had watched him; but William saw more than the skipper, because his eyes were unbiassed and open to every aspect of the case. Unconsciously John was blind in some particulars. He magnified the indications of promise that Ned revealed; he passed over without observation those other implicit evidences that the boy still heartily disliked the sea.

The fault was partly Ned's own, for from love of his father he hid much; while, before Michelmore and Gilberd, there was no need to do so. His fate did not rest with them, and his discomfort was no concern of theirs. Therefore they saw more than Mr. Major did; and while Michelmore—a young man with his own life and ambitions before him—took no interest in Ned's troubles, Gilberd, who had boys of his own, perceived the truth, and saw that the skipper's son was not destined to follow in the skipper's shoes. He liked Ned well; he doubted whether Ned would ever forgive him for this inter-

ference; he felt uncertain also how John himself might be disposed to view it; yet now he lumbered up to state his opinions on this delicate subject; and for a little while John Major forgot his daughter's affairs while he listened to how the position and prospects of his son, Ned, struck the mind of a friendly and impartial observer.

"'Tisn't for me, in a general sort of way, to offer my views to a wiser man than what I am myself," said Gilberd; "but your sense be great enough even to listen to me, because you know I ban't a meddler. In a word, 'tis your boy. He hides from you what he shows me, and 'tis more than likely that if you'd seen what I've seen, you'd think the same as me. He've no call for the sea, master; and when you look around and see what fishing be coming to, you did ought to be glad and not sorry 'tis so. Brixham's not what it was. None of the fishing-places be what they was. All on the down grade, and if they last our time, they won't be much use to our children, let alone our grandchildren. Take Mousehole down in Cornwall. Ten year agone there was seventy big luggers sailed from there. Now there's not much above thirty. You can't man the boats. And that's why my eldest boy's a plasterer and my second be going into a shop."

"You speak as one without a boat of your own, however," interrupted John.

"Granted, and if what I've said was all I'd got to say, I wouldn't have come. But there's more than that: there's Ned hisself. I tell you that you can't put a square peg into a round hole, and you can't make a farmer turn sailor. There 'tis, and you'll excuse my rough way of speaking, John. But never did a boy go to sea as was less likely to stop there. Not but what he'll be useful enough, and clever enough. Packed with brains he is. But—I've said enough. I'm sorry for him—such a civil, active, willing chap as he is; but 'tis like one of they Italian monkeys chained to a barrel-organ to see him aboard

of us. You feel as his place be somewhere else altogether. And so it is—so it is, if I've got two eyes in my head."

Mr. Major nodded at Gilberd's full stops, and when he had done continued to keep silence.

"And now I'll be gone," said the fisherman, "and I hope to God as I haven't made a hole in my manners; but I felt called to speak, though in justice to my wife I must tell you she advised me not."

"One thing's sure," answered the other. " 'Twas nought but goodwill opened your mouth, and I thank you for it. I've seen a bit of all this. I've given a deal of thought to it. I'm too well used to giving up my own way, to fight for it in the matter of Ned's future. But I won't deny that I hope still with my whole heart to make a fisherman of him. He's young yet; 'tis too early, William, to say that he won't grow to like the sea. I mark signs that he's getting to care for it. I hope on. 'Twill be a hard knock to me if he turns against it presently; but I trust for the right to happen, and I know the right will happen, because it always does."

"Enough said, then," replied the other. "You've got enough faith for a crew, if not a fleet, and I can only trust that such a power of faith will get properly rewarded both here and hereafter. And no offence, I hope."

"None," declared Mr. Major, and William departed.

Darkness crowded down upon the evening of the day, for Ned, ignorant of the other matter involving his sister, showed some depression at the thought of the coming journey 'round land' and the long absence from home. Then returned Lydia. She crept to her room unseen; but her father called her to him and, alone, heard of her grief. He was firm and patient; she wept and exclaimed against her fate; he told her of his interview with Mr. Brokenshire; she, fresh from Sam's company and Sam's gloss on the truth, showed little present inclination

to listen to reason, and cried out that her father was unjust.

He left her at last, and when the sad day ended and his children were both gone to bed, he smoked in the kitchen and opened a little of his mind to his sister.

From John Major's own simple clarity of heart he saw what was best in another's. He knew the good qualities of his children and had always fostered them. But to-night the weakness of youth weighed upon him; the responsibilities of a father to a motherless girl struck him as before it had never done.

Mr. Major puffed his pipe, pulled alternately at his gold earrings, and stared into the fire. Emma was lachrymose.

"'Tis all of a piece with the family's usual luck," she said. "Not a pinch of good fortune ever got into the pot when Michelmores and Majors were brewing. The boy hates the sea worse than you hate sin, and here's Lydia, almost afore her mother be cold in the grave, breaks loose and chooses that good-looking dare-devil of a fellow. And not the first that's cried her eyes out for the scamp. I wonder he had the honesty to come to you for her; 'twould have been more his way to go crooked over it. 'Tis all a mizmaze, I'm sure; and the grave's the only place of peace as I can see offering for any that bear our name."

"We must be patient, however."

"Good Lord! you needn't tell me that. Ban't patience the marrow in my bones? Don't I live on it? 'Tis all I've got left. Haven't I starved on patience ever since my childer died? But it don't get the world on that I can see; it don't mend the bad. Patience won't build Brixham breakwater, nor open Start Bay. Patience be very well for old women like me, but no vartue in your children. However, I know nothing—except that I hope God Almighty will do a little more for our family in the next world than He has in this—to say it civilly."

Mr. Major shook his head.

"That's not patience, and nothing like patience, and it don't become you at all, Emma," he answered. "You ban't in a very Christian spirit to-night. You'll do well to go to bed."

Mrs. Michelmore sniffed.

"If you expect to hear cheerful things, you didn't ought to come to me," she answered. "We all know you've got a faith out of the common, and the harder you'm smitten, the more you offer t'other cheek; but —but—as for me——"

She lost the thread of her argument, ceased, and relapsed into familiar tears.

"Don't," he said. "Ban't your usual time for weeping. After supper you'm cheerful as a rule, and I beg you'll continue so. 'Tis only because it's Sunday, and there's nought for your busy hands to do. I'll read you the second lesson as we had to-night. If you'd come to church, instead of stopping at home messing about, you'd have heard it better read than I can read it."

CHAPTER XII

WHERE two flights of steps fall irregularly to the street, there stands a coffin house at Brixham. It boasts itself of a phœnix rarity, but though others cast in the same grim pattern exist, a better example may not easily be found. The shape of his home, however, had no effect on the actual tenant of the coffin house. Mr. Frederick Bolder was a barber; his pole, striped red, white, and blue, thrust jauntily from the side of his shop; and his face, when seen at the doorway, invariably wore an expression of content. Mr. Bolder was young and stout and prosperous. He shaved the fishermen on Sunday mornings, and at that time a dozen men would often be loafing at the entrance of the coffin house, awaiting each his turn.

There came a Sunday, one month after that on which Mr. Brokenshire made his appeal to John Major, when Sam with other fishermen stood about the door of the barber's shop. Then Dick Varwell passed, and Billy Trust, who was also of the party, chaffed him.

"Why for don't you get your hair cut, Dick?" he asked. "'Tis half-way down your back, like a woman's. But I suppose you think that if it grows a bit longer, you'll look like one of they holy blades in the glass windows to church."

Mr. Bolder paused, razor in hand.

"Dick's waiting to get his hair cut for nothing—ban't you, Dick?" he asked, and a laugh rose at the expense of the tramp.

Mr. Varwell stopped and laughed with the rest.

"Gimme a cigarette, Sam," he said. "Freddy Bolder here ought to get in a few new jokes, or else

try to make some for himself. 'Twas I said that against another man a year ago. However, we must be tender with poor Freddy. He's going to be married; and I hear of one or two other cases of the same kind among us. Marriage be catching as measles, as I've always said."

He winked at Brokenshire, and took tobacco from him.

Another man joined the group. He was elderly and pock-marked; he had a high, narrow forehead, and round, simple eyes of the colour of horn. A reddish beard and moustache, streaked with grey, belonged to him, and they hid a little mouth and feeble chin.

"Hullo, uncle!" cried Brokenshire, "didn't know you was a customer of Freddy's."

Mr. Titus Peach, Sam's maternal uncle, a bachelor and the owner of the biggest barking yard in Brixham, exhibited some nervous concern. He had not expected so large a company, and was about to move on, when the barber, who never lost a customer, arrested him.

"Come in and sit down, Mr. Peach. These gentlemen ban't in no hurry, and won't mind if I take you next. Beard wants trimming again, I see. 'Tis wonderful how thick and strong it comes."

"Blessed if here ban't another!" declared Tumbledown Dick. "So you've come to it at last, Titus, after half a century of the single state? And who's the lucky creature, if we may ask? Don't tell me it ban't so. When a man takes to fussing about his beard, there's a wife in the wind always."

Mr. Varwell, who spoke much nearer the truth than he had any idea, was now told by the barber to shut his mouth and not block the gangway; but he refused either to be silent or to move on.

"No, no, Freddy. Let me talk to these here marrying men, including yourself. You're all hoodwinked—just as the men already married be hoodwinked for that matter. Not that the women can

help it. They'm born to play a double part. Women be like cats—wild creatures pretending to be tame. 'Tis all pretence to gain their own ends and get their fish and milk regular. Angels without claws, when they be hungry or thirsty. But that's only one side —the side they show us. They live in a different world to ours really; and if you could see your wife's heart or your cat's heart, as it is, 'twould be a proper eye-opener for some of you married men. If you want to skim the cream off women, keep a bachelor. To marry be like jumping into a river because you're thirsty. You'll do a lot better to bide on the bank, pick your drinking-place careful, and then, when you've had enough, go on your way."

"You speak as a man that no decent woman would touch with a pair of tongs," said Mr. Bolder.

"Curling tongs," suggested Varwell. "And as to that, even I could marry if I pleased. There's females within my knowledge who would marry a scarecrow if it had power of speech to ax 'em."

"'Tisn't for the likes of you to preach, whether or no," said Billy Trust. "'Tis better for a young man to go courting than to go drinking, any way."

The proposition interested Dick and he disputed it.

"That shows how little you've thought out things," he answered. "That's the stuff you poor fishermen hear your betters say; and then you say it again in company and think 'tis wisdom. To be drunk is a matter between a man and his own affairs; but to be in love is a matter between a man and a woman; and that may mean the next generation. Let the State look after the lovers, Billy Trust: the drunkards can look after themselves. Who do I hurt if I lift my elbow too high? Only myself. But here's Jack Stockman going to marry a woman whose mother's in a lunatic asylum, and nobody says a word to prevent it. 'Tis Jack ought to be locked up, not me. Now if I get drunk, they lock me up; but if I marry and get a child, everybody would say I was a re-

formed character. But I know better. I'm not the sort to have any hand in the next generation, and well I know it; and so I'd no more start out in that direction than I'd put a match to Sam's boat."

"What jargon you talk, and expect sensible men to listen!" retorted Trust. "And such a life as yours! I wonder you've got the face to utter your opinions."

"So do I," answered Mr. Varwell; "I'm often more astonished at my own sense than you could be, Billy, or the like of you. But I don't expect Brixham fishermen to understand. I'm afore my time, like John the Baptist was, and a few other heroes. The treason of to-day's the reason of to-morrow. I'm quite accustomed to be a voice crying in the wilderness—now drunk, now sober. But you can't chop my head off nowadays for my opinions, though I dare say that a few of you noodles—you that pin your silly faith to money-grubbing parsons and money-spending squires—would like to do so."

"I won't have no more of that trash here," said Mr. Bolder, from his saloon. "Go away, Varwell, and take your evil opinions along with you."

The barber was now engaged upon Mr. Peach's ragged beard, and when Tumbledown Dick, singing his one and only song, went off unruffled, attention turned to Titus. That he should exhibit any concern about his appearance gave rise to some merriment. His simplicity was notorious, and he had no enemies. Experience had often shown him the safety of silence, and he could be obstinate in this particular. Now, under a fire of questions and suggestions, humorous and coarse, Mr. Peach preserved a taciturn attitude. Even his nephew could get no answers out of him.

Presently his toilette was completed; his beard and hair were trimmed, and he put on his hat and coat and departed. To the quay Mr. Peach went; but when he was out of sight from the group at the coffin house, he made a detour, worked round behind

them again, and presently proceeded in a direction exactly opposite to that on which he had appeared to journey. His way now took him past the dwelling of John Major, and here he stopped, cast suspicious eyes in every direction, and then approached the entrance. But a couple of fishermen came down the street, whereupon Mr. Peach slipped away from the door and pretended to take no interest in it. When the men had passed out of sight, however, he crept back again. Thrice he was frightened off and thrice he returned. His manner suggested a timorous bird that has found a treasure but dare not take the risk of possession. Anon the folk began to come back from their places of worship, and Mr. Peach lost heart altogether. His enterprise, whatever that might have been, was abandoned for the present.

"I'll try again when 'tis the quiet time after dinner, and the people be in their houses," he said to himself.

The man then went home to his abode on the outskirts of the town and walked in a little garden, where every grass-blade kept its place. Here were roses, day-lilies, larkspurs, and pæonies, arranged with desolate precision and exactitude. Over the iron wicket-gate drooped a laburnum, and screwed to the gate was a brass plate with the name of Titus Peach upon it. During these uneasy moments, before further endeavour, Mr. Peach found peace in the contemplation of his growing things. He visited his kitchen garden presently, frightened away a blackbird from his cherry tree, destroyed three caterpillars, and then went indoors to dinner. He ate in the kitchen, and the old servant who waited on him shared the meal. She was inquisitive, but Mr. Peach remained very taciturn. The meal ended, he went back to his garden and smoked his pipe in a little grotto made of shells, splinters of quartz, and pieces of coral. This erection, the work of his own hand through a space of eight years, always soothed the spirit of Mr. Peach, and it did so to-day. He started presently with renewed energy and renewed hope;

and as Sam Brokenshire had recently knocked at John Major's door, so now did Titus boldly announce himself. But he did not come to see the fisherman. Indeed, he knew very well that the 'Jack and Lydia' was far away somewhere between Lundy and Wales.

Mrs. Michelmore answered the door. She wore her usual black Sunday gown and her customary long-suffering expression.

"Master's 'round land,'" she said.

He extended his hand and she shook it. They were very slightly acquainted, though Emma sometimes used Mr. Peach, in conversation, as an example of the prosperous sort whose fortune never fails.

"I know," answered Mr. Peach. "I know your brother's away, and I hope he's doing well, as he deserves to do. But, if I'm not here at a wrong moment, I'd like to have a bit of a tell with you, Mrs. Michelmore."

"And welcome. You can't be worse company than my own thoughts," she answered. "Lydia's gone mooning out somewhere. She's very much changed from herself since her father said she shouldn't take your nephew. So I'm alone—as far as one can be with such ghosts as I've got in my mind always. Come in the parlour and I'll dust a chair for you."

They sat together presently, and Mr. Peach allowed his round, amber-coloured eyes to rest on the figure of Mrs. Michelmore. He thought it neat and shapely.

"I could wish my nephew was worthy of your niece," he said. "But I won't talk about that, though I've got a great opinion of Samuel myself."

"There's something in the wind, and I wish her father was home again. 'Tis all of a piece, and will end in confusion and tears and the bread of sorrow—like everything else belonging to us."

"Don't say such dreadful things, I beg of you."

"What's the use of pretending? Have you ever heard our history? I'll tell it to you if you can bear to hear it."

"Anything about your family be very interesting

to me," declared Mr. Peach. "In fact, much more so than you might guess."

"Then take my life—my married life. We buried four; and then I buried my husband, who fell off the pier-head in the dark, though a liar here and there said drink. And then there was Uncle Stooks went mad, so we buried him. And then there was poor young Bolder, the barber's brother, tokened to my sister Sarah—throwed off one of they swinging boats of Hancock's to Brixham regatta, he was, and broke his neck; so we buried him—and none ever lifted a finger for Sarah again. And then there was my sister-in-law—she went home a bit back along and left John a widow-man and helpless as a sheep. And then comes this business of Sam Brokenshire; and I've cried rivers over it, and so have my niece; and what will be the next blow only the watching Lord can tell."

"Terrible interesting; but perhaps there's a bit of good luck coming," ventured Titus. "Surely 'tis time and more than time the wind set into a milder quarter like."

She looked at him with wonder.

"You can say that with such a history laid bare afore you! Never no good luck for us, Mr. Peach. 'Tis too late to hope for it or expect now. Such a thing would throw us off our balance very like, and make us lose our heads altogether. I doubt if we could stand it after all these years. No, no; evil fortune be our food, and we can't expect any other meat now."

"But of course it depends a lot on what you call luck," argued the man. "Now you might say that I had good fortune. I don't deny it, mind you—in a way. The barking yard does very well, and everybody knows that I use the best stuff I can buy, and so I get twice the number of sails that any other barker gets. And there's my house up the street out of the town—all my own. In fact, I've got property and so on. And yet I'm not satisfied, I assure you."

"That's to say, you're a human creature. Who is satisfied?"

"The question in my mind be this: Whether my luck will run to the high water-mark of a man's good fortune and get me the wife I want—or stop short of that?"

"'Tis most unlikely," she declared, "and you'll tempt fortune once too often if you try it. A wife you can pick up, no doubt: they be commoner than cast horseshoes; but—— However, I suppose you didn't come to ax my opinion on such a question as that?"

"Just what I did do," he answered. "I'm a bachelor without much knowledge of 'em; you're a widow, and a wise one. I've always felt a great respect for you, though so little acquainted. And that was because you ban't one of they laughing, prattling women—the sort that are never cast down, but always pretend to be gay and hopeful. I couldn't abide a creature as never had her solemn moments; and for that matter I'm no laugher myself; and for all my luck I ban't feared to face the dark side, as we all should. In fact, my wife must have a character and experience. I'm not a very fine figure of a man, and I don't rely upon myself so much as upon what lies behind me. There's the barking-yard and my house and garden—all solid things that won't run away. And any sensible creature must take the rough with the smooth."

"You must find somebody as could get to care for you yourself, however; for if her soul was set 'pon your goods only, you'd feel all the time she wanted you to die and make room for another—a very common thing in Brixham."

He looked uneasy.

"I couldn't stand that, I'm sure. 'Twould spoil life without a doubt if I felt the woman had no use for me," declared Mr. Peach.

"Then what you've got to do is to find somebody capable of liking you apart from the property," she explained.

He shook his head.

"'Tis almost too much to expect; but I ought to be thrown in, certainly. I've a right to ask to be took as a serious item. I'm an immortal soul, whatever may be the matter with my mortal body."

Mrs. Michelmore regarded him in doubt.

"I don't exactly see why you should cry stinking fish at your age. You're thin and homely; but you've got a spry way with you, and plenty of manhood. Nobody goes cleaner to church of a Sunday. Your voice is a thought weak and piping for a male, but any sensible woman would soon get used to it. I suppose you'll be sixty or thereabouts?"

"Fifty-eight to-day. In fact, I chose the day—for luck."

"Ah! Well, I wish you a few happy returns of it yet. Between sixty and seventy we break up as a rule, and feel the grave beginning to yawn for us. But such a man as you—healthy to the eye, though no doubt you've got your secrets—may hope to enjoy life a bit longer, I dare say."

"Thank you, I'm sure. And I feel the same. Such a word from you means a great deal, because you never was one of they dashing, hopeful women; and never known to chatter about every dark cloud having a silver lining, and such-like."

"No you won't hear nothing about silver linings from me. I only tell what I know."

"And so—and so," continued Mr. Peach, after a pause, "I've felt, though but slightly acquainted, that you and me have a mournful lot in common, and should never get above ourselves, or take our happiness for granted, or think that we was going to make earth what only heaven can be. In fact, in a word, after thinking upon it for two years, I be so certain as a man can be certain of anything with his poor feeble intellects, that you and me—eh? Don't look at me like that, there's a good creature! At least I've a right to speak—'tis a free country. And I can't pay you no more respect than by axing you."

"Do you mean an offer of marriage?" she asked.

"I do with all my heart."

"And you haven't spoken a dozen words to me in your life!"

"But I've thought the more. You can't make that a grievance. I've worked up to a terrible high pitch of respect for you; and if you'll take me I shall be a proud man. And as for a husband, you know what a husband should be better than I can—your first was a very upstanding figure—but I'll be the best I know how, and very glad to learn, and always terrible anxious and willing to fall in with your views and opinions in general."

"Say no more," she answered. "'Tis far too crushing and sudden. I can't grasp it. Besides, why for should I be so selfish? 'Tis so sure as death that my luck won't change at sixty-one—for that's my age, though I dare say it suprises you a good bit to hear it. But if I was to take you, you'd have to share my dark prospects, and I think too well of you to wish any such thing."

"I'll chance your luck and back mine," he said hopefully. "If you think well of me, that is very good fortune for me in itself. The only bad luck that can come to me at this minute is for you to say 'No.'"

She murmured something about "Michelmore luck," and was then silent. He urged his suit.

"Don't decide in a hurry; be fair to yourself, if not to me. Wait, any way, till you've seen the house and garden. You've only had a look at me yet, and, as I said afore, I'm out and away the worst part of the bargain. I've got money surprises for you, too. Of course, you've heard of my grotto? Who hasn't? It took me years and years—every shell and crystal and lobster-claw put in its place by my own hand. 'Tis a masterpiece—cool in summer and warm in winter. And 'Laburnum Villa' be that peaceful that you wouldn't know yourself after this noisy street. Fruit, too, and my own well of sweet water, and everything.

In justice you ought to see the place afore you decide against me."

"John would never suffer it."

"Don't you say that. He's a fair man afore everything—and religious—a burning light and a lesson to us all, and a married man himself, though he's lost her now. He'd never stand between you and a home of your own—and such a home. And remember this: I'm out every day of the week but Sunday. You'd have a great respite from me. 'Twouldn't be like they men who live over their shops and muddle and fuss about at home all day. I shouldn't be in the way; you'd have the house to yourself to do with as you pleased. And another thing: I never come in the rooms after I've been barking. I've got a shed down at the bottom of the garden, and there I change every stitch of clothes. You won't see a spot of ochre or grease in the house—not a spot."

"You wander in your speech so," she answered. "My brother was the subject. How can I leave him —a forlorn wretch with none but a love-sick daughter to look after him?"

"Well, I'm a forlorn wretch, if it comes to that. He can do what I want to do and get a wife—after a decent space of time."

"Not John. He's had one prize; he won't risk another trial."

Mr. Peach began to lose heart.

"At any rate, you might think it over," he said. "I grant I sprang it on you. But the thought to offer suddenly came upon me, like a giant in the night; and though I was most afraid of my own shadow in the morning, yet I managed to get through with it, as you see. So I ask you, Emma Michelmore—yes, I will call you 'Emma' without fear—I ask you to do nothing in haste. Think about it and my great respect for you. And reedy though my voice may be, I'm a brave fashion of man behind it, and can look all the world in the face. And why shouldn't I? So consider of it, and ax your brother

his opinion, and get him to tell you how I stand in the town. 'Twill come better from him than me. And walk over and see round the house and garden. You might do that, any way, without committing yourself."

"That's true," she said. "I'll see the house and garden, since you so much wish it; but don't hope. I hold out no hope at all—quite the contrary. I'm not hopeful myself and never was, and I won't, if I can help it, make anybody else hopefuller by so much as a shadow. However, me and my niece will come over Wednesday afternoon, if that's convenient."

"Tea shall be ready—in the grotto. I've often and often wanted for to invite you, and I'm glad that you'll come. And you'll think about all I've said, and look round every side of the subject—every side. Of course, it's got a many."

"Yes, you've a right to say that. I'll look round every side; and if I find a terrible dark side to it—as I certainly shall do—you mustn't blame me for telling you."

"But try and see the bright side, too, Emma," he urged.

"You needn't fear that. I'm only too ready to pounce when chance offers a bright side to anything. But blind I won't be—not at my age—and least of all in such a matter as this."

"I shall pray every morning and evening on my knees about it," he said, "for that sort of man am I."

Then he left her.

CHAPTER XIII

Before John Major went to St. George's Channel for a period of uncertain length, he had ordered Lydia to see no more of Sam Brokenshire, and for a week she obeyed him. Then love conquered; youth burned to youth. Convinced that her father was cruelly wrong in this matter, the girl threw in her lot with her lover, and henceforth trusted Samuel to plan their united lives. He rejoiced in the task and undertook it instantly. The preliminary adventure, with its scorn of authority and flagrant romance, was very good to Sam. He arranged everything, and submitted his scheme to Lydia; whereupon she, not without tears, admired its perfection, yet modified it and improved it in certain particulars.

There was none to interfere, and only five people knew of the enterprise.

Lydia, having through stress and toil made up her mind, did not turn again. She preferred, indeed, to look forward rather than back; and she assured herself that, with time, her father must come to perceive that Samuel was a rare spirit misunderstood, and that such a wife as she intended to make him was all that he needed to complete his education and perfect his character. She longed for months to fly that these things might appear.

There came an evening when her aunt spoke to the girl, and, at another time, the proposition would have astonished Lydia not a little; but to-night there was room in her mind for one secret thing alone.

"That Titus Peach be at me to go and see his garden, and take some of his gooseberries," said Mrs. Michelmore. "I've told him that pleasuring and

fruit-eating be for birds and not an old woman wading through a sea of troubles like me; but Peach won't take 'no' for an answer. He've got ideas, for strange things come into the heads even of the least of God's creatures, and nothing will do but that I drink a dish of tea in his shell grotto, though I dare say I'll be chilled to the marrow by it. And to-morrow's the appointed day, and I shall be glad if you'll please to bear me company."

"I'm very sure he don't want me," said Lydia. Sam had told her what was in his uncle's mind; indeed, the matter had caused her lover a little concern, since he was Mr. Peach's heir.

"I want you, however. I've told him you're to be there."

"Then of course I'll come gladly with you—some day, Aunt Emma," the girl answered.

She had lived a big lie for three weeks, yet her soul hesitated at telling a little one now.

"'Tis to-morrow, not 'some day,'" answered Mrs. Michelmore; "and we'll start in our second best to the man about four of the clock. Please agree to come. Ban't often I ax you to do anything for me—or any other living creature either. But seeing the aunt I've been, I reckon that 'tisn't much to beg."

"Of course if you speak like that——" said Lydia.

But when the morrow came, many startling things had fallen out, and among them Mr. Titus Peach, his roses, his gooseberries, and his grotto were all forgotten. He waited long, brewed a second pot of tea, invented a thousand excuses for the widow; but the sun sank and she came not. Then a mild irritation settled upon the heart of Titus, and it was only lifted when the truth reached him.

Upon the morning of her promised visit to Mr. Peach, Emma Michelmore rose at six o'clock, and doubted not that, as usual, she was at work an hour before her niece had wakened; but for once she erred. Two letters, with their directions in Lydia's writing, lay upon the kitchen table. They caught her eye as

she pulled up the blind, and she saw that one was addressed to Mr. Major and one to herself. Mrs. Michelmore opened the window and a yellow cat came in, rubbed against her and purred loudly. She then sat down with her letter, and while she read it the effusive cat jumped on to her lap and continued its morning salutations.

During the brief hours of darkness, after midnight in late May, King William, with moonlight on his ridiculous head, might have observed from his harbour perch the unusual spectacle of a girl hastening along the sleeping quay. There had been a night auction two hours earlier, and the selling place had echoed with the croaking tones of Mr. Memery and flashed with glare of many lights; but now all was silent, empty, dark, save for the moonlight shining steadily on earth and dancing in sheets and splashes upon the sea. The houses of Brixham ascended ridge on ridge with glimmering roofs; and here and there a window caught the light and stared like a blind eye over the silence. Where men were wont to polish the parapet with their elbows, the moonlight now flashed, and in the harbour, among the boats, it wove many a beautiful, intricate pattern, while reflections and shadows and the movement of the ebbing tide worked together.

Then came a footfall under the statue, and Lydia Major made haste beside the houses and kept her way as much as possible in the darkness of the shadows. Long before, Sam had come up, after Mrs. Michelmore was in bed, and secretly taken her box away on his shoulders. And now he met her at the steps, where stood two other men. Tumble-down Dick was one, Saul Mutter the other.

"A very fine bit of work," declared Dick, taking off his ragged cap to Lydia; "and so long as there are girls like you in the world, we shall no doubt continue to have a good sporting pattern of boys; and if you and Sam here ban't the parents of some

useful, go-ahead rascals in fulness of time, then you ought to be. Have no fear, my dear. You're in the right, for you've got Nature on your side, and holy John—I mean your father—will be the first to see presently that two young heads are often better than one old one. I'll tell him all about it when he comes home; and I'll break it to him gently."

"He'll know long before that," said Sam. "Lydia's left a letter for her aunt, and another for him; and of course Mrs. Michelmore will send a telegram to Ilfracombe to the 'Jack and Lydia' the first thing to-morrow. So the next time they go ashore to land their fish, Mr. Major will get to hear what we've done. Then he'll come back—by train most likely—and set to work to find us."

"No doubt; but since I shall be the only man in Brixham as knows where you both are, he'll look in vain."

"And now the tide's turned and we'd best to be gone," said Sam. "Dawn'll break out of the sea afore we'm clear of the Bay as 'tis."

Mr. Varwell wished them all good fortune and shook hands both with Lydia and Samuel. He watched awhile as the dinghy, pulled by Mr. Mutter, crept out of harbour; then, like some nocturnal beast before the warning finger of dawn, he shambled away to his lair.

On the 'Night Hawk' Billy Trust was waiting. The trawler's sails were up, her lights were lit. Soon Lydia was helped aboard and then Samuel escorted her below. Much rough comfort had been planned for her. A little fire burnt in the stove. Her box was lifted to a bunk. The opposite bunk had been covered with a white counterpane. A pot of tea simmered on the stove. Hardly a trace of the skipper and crew of the boat appeared anywhere in the cabin.

The men were prepared to let Lydia have the cabin to herself, and intended to spend the night on deck; but she desired no such thing, and soon ar-

ranged a programme that better suited them all. She drank some tea; then with Mr. Mutter's aid brewed a large pot for the rest; and presently, much to their satisfaction, Saul and Billy Trust were permitted to turn in until morning, while Sam took charge and Lydia sat beside him at the tiller, snugly wrapped in tarpaulins. The night reigned very still at sea. An off-shore breeze held steadily, and the 'Night Hawk,' with her waking lovers and sleeping crew, stood quietly away to the east.

Lydia and Samuel dreamed brave dreams, yet planned the future with great sobriety. To the woman it seemed a most natural and proper thing that she should be here in Samuel's keeping; the weather helped largely to add to the glory and fascination of her act. She thought upon her brother, and marveled that he could hate the sea. Lydia found herself in love with the kindly element. She watched the morning break; she saw the stars vanish and the sky take on a tone as of old ivory. It spread clear and pure above the twilit sea. Then light kindled on the horizon, flamed aloft rosily and flung great single burning flakes of fire upon the water. At the zenith the firmament grew very blue; ahead Portland Bill loomed misty and vast out of the morning. But their goal lay beyond it.

Lydia Major's attitude of mind in this first great defiant action of life was her own. Sam himself would not have inspired her to it had her instincts echoed her father's reasons and admitted their justice; but out of mingled emotion rose the conviction that Mr. Major was not just; that, indeed, he was absolutely and hopelessly mistaken in this matter. Lydia was now eighteen years old; she had enjoyed an education superior in every respect to her father's; she felt that in matters of the world few had less knowledge than he, and that consequently few were less justified in forming opinions. Yet over this crucial business of love, he claimed his authority and commanded her to do impossible

things. She had argued long with him; she had brought messages from Samuel to him; but for once his patience had forsaken John Major, and he had blamed Lydia bitterly for speaking with Mr. Brokenshire again after being forbidden to do so. And then, wounded at heart, her father went off to sea for an indefinite space of time, and Lydia, also wounded, brooded at home. After a week of thought only one thing caused her to hesitate, and when he heard it, her lover uttered a solemn promise. He swore that he would never go fishing in Start Bay again. Then, believing him and convinced that by no right or reason need she decline longer to be Sam's wife, Lydia consented and they planned the future with utmost speed.

The first step was to marry, and, in order to complete this business safely and evade risk of interruption, Sam decreed they must disappear and give no sign of their destination until the deed was done. Flight in the 'Night Hawk' was of course his notion; and he vowed that his boat henceforth would possess an additional value and sentimental worth by reason of this noble achievement.

They meant to hide until the necessary days were past. During the time Lydia would keep ashore, Samuel with his crew intended to fish waters well beyond the beat of the Brixham boats. Then, once married, Sam and Lydia would sail back boldly to their home; she would ascend the steps of Overgang and henceforth reign in Mr. Brokenshire's little cottage until fate enabled them to take a better. The place was to be renovated, re-papered and re-painted during their absence. Mr. Peach had undertaken to superintend these duties for his nephew; but of course he knew not where or why Sam was going from home so long.

Here, too, it may be noted that accident prevented Lydia's letter to her father. It came about that John Major did not receive it or learn what had happened until his return home. He had changed his plans,

and, finding the North Channel fishing badly, determined to leave it and go east. Thus, a telegram despatched to Ilfracombe by Mrs. Michelmore on the morning of Lydia's disappearance was not delivered, as her brother did not return to that port, and Lydia's letter had grown more than a week old before he opened it on the day that he sailed home again to Brixham.

But the news fell upon him by word of mouth before he left the harbour. Then he heard from Mr. Varwell that Lydia had taken her life into her own keeping and run away to marry Brokenshire; that she meant to return at once after the ceremony; and that she begged her father to make no attempt to interfere with her plans, because her conscience was clear in this matter, and she knew that she was doing right and following the road that Providence had planned for her.

Lydia had been absent from her home for eight days before her father and brother returned and heard the news.

CHAPTER XIV

Along the familiar parapet that stretches to seaward of Brixham harbour a dozen loafers were assembled. They smoked and said harsh things concerning local government and the times. For generations upon this lifted pathway has the world of Brixham been set right by word of mouth; for generations have the fisherman's life and conduct, present hope and future prospects, been the theme. The debaters are usually vague and lack all synthetic power. According to inherited instincts, or acquired prejudices built on personal experience, they speak. A few of better education and intellect feel out dimly to the secret of their troubles; but none goes to the root; none admits to himself that the industry as here pursued is doomed. They take each problem singly; they fail either to relate them, or to perceive that the slow but steady deterioration of their outlook, and the decrease of their prosperity, are caused by various forces working together upon different aspects of the question. Little light comes to these theorists, and they live in extreme mental confusion. The religious cast their troubles on an Almighty's shoulders; the majority give man the blame and attribute their difficulties and disabilities to the shortcoming of the governing class. These would fight, but dare not for fear of immediate ruin. They recognise none of the efforts made in so many directions on their behalf; they credit neither individuals, councils, nor associations with any desire to advance their welfare; a sense of gratitude, always extremely rare among the folk, is in danger of disappearing under the stress of the times. The men are jealous, narrow-minded, and suspicious; and

it was to these qualities that the philosophy of Mr. Varwell sometimes ministered. His hearers had no wit to winnow Dick's grain of wheat from the bushel of chaff in which he was accustomed to present it. They listened to him, half in scorn, half in doubt, but many believed that he spoke wisdom and was a friend of the people despite his worthless life and manners.

He sat now on the parapet beside half a score of men, smoked, spat, and listened with open contempt to their conversations.

Each advanced his theory of the situation, and some were sentimental, and some were scientific, and none agreed together save in this: that Brixham was going to the dogs a good deal quicker than the rest of the world.

"Look at wages," said a fisherman who kept at home with a broken shoulder-blade; "can any man deny that they be dropping to starvation pitch? Week after week now 'tis silver, where it used to be gold. How are we to go on living, and how are the owners to go on keeping boats seaworthy? That's the puzzle."

"'Tis this cursed Free Trade in the Channel," declared an old man with a forehead like an ape's. His hair was bristling and came almost to his eyebrows; his eyes were very small and dim; his chin was shaven, but from the extremity of it there sprouted a small, grey fan-shaped beard.

"What I say is, that if England rules the waves, why the hell be they French and Belgian steam trawlers allowed in sight of us? They swarm where, in my youth, none dare show theirselves but Plymouth and Brixham boats. If we'd met a foreigner there, us would soon have sent his trawl to the bottom, and his boat after it, if he'd showed fight; but now, along with their steam, they laugh at us and sweep the sea. And the men we vote into Parliament help 'em to ruin us."

"To hear you silly old fools!" exclaimed Tumble-

down Dick. "Haven't you larned yet that England don't rule the waves and don't rule nothing? Man alive, she can't rule herself! She's like a big horse whipped by a little jockey. The beast's eyes do magnify, so that he don't know how small the chap that rides him really be. And 'tis like that along with us: we think the governing body is far bigger and stronger than it is. Our silly eyes magnify it out of all truth, and so we suffer the scourge and spur, and don't know yet—and God knows when we shall know—that *we* be England—arm and head and leg—not these here puny puppets danced over us. As for French and Belgian trawlers, I'm all for the rights of man myself, and, if they've got more sense than you chaps, and more industry, and can put steam into their boats, they deserve to lick you. The battle's to the strong."

"'Tisn't they foreigners at all," declared another man. He was thin and hawk-like, with a bent nose, bright eyes, and withered cheeks. "'Tis these here north winds be responsible. I've marked 'em, though nobody else seems to see it. They blow off and on for weeks and weeks through the winters nowadays, and they bring down a monstrous body of icy cold water from the North Sea. That's why fish be that scarce. The Channel's too cold for 'em, and they go south to deep water—and they never come back. More and more go every year, and a time will come in the future when there won't be a marketable fish left in our waters. You mark my words."

"No such thing," argued a man with one leg. "There's a plenty of fish—more than ever there was; but we've got into a custom of using a wrong mesh. Because some people thought that whiting could get through a small mesh, we got making mesh smaller and smaller, and now we kill millions and millions of undersized dabs and plaice and such like. 'Tis that folly be cutting our throats. Whiting's responsible for the whole mischief. If we was to leave whiting alone and let 'em slip—and be damned to 'em!

—and make our mesh half so large again, in two years' time we'd all be getting gold once more instead of silver."

"We talk, but we do nought," said the man with the fan beard. "You may hear good sense and deep arguments here any day, and I dare say many a thing be said among us that's well worth minding and acting upon; but unless we gather ourselves together and let the nation hear our opinions, nought will ever be done. Who knows that we'm discontented? Nobody, except our wives and the salesmen. So, of course, not a hand is lifted."

"The Lord knows," said a very dark, hirsute, sullen-looking man who stood a little apart with his eyes on the sea. "The Lord well knows we'm discontented, and He knows—or should do—that well we may be. And He'll keep us in trouble till we mind His commands. You chaps get together and talk a lot of silly stuff about winds and weather and foreigners and no fish. 'Tis the old 'keep holy' question that be ruining Brixham; and so long as we put business afore religion and break the commandment, just because others do, so long we'll get punished for it. 'Tis very well for Lowestoft men to meet Newlyn men and have a great palaver about Sunday fishing; and 'tis very well for Newlyn men not to fish o' Sunday; but they keep off it on account of the market, not because of God Almighty's orders. And now the Lowestoft men will do likewise; but not for religion, and they won't hoodwink their Maker, though they may think to. As for us, the time has gone when the Lord would spare a place if a dozen righteous men were found in it. Such miracles don't happen now; and so we all go down to the pit together."

His eyes blazed, and he shook his fist at Brixham with prophetic indignation.

"Hold hard!" cried Dick Varwell; "that's not worthy of you, Mr. Larkin. Why, even John Major wouldn't go so far as that. Do you think the right-

eous are to suffer for the guilty and still call your God a sportsman? Would He do things that you'd duck a welsher for doing? would He do things you'd warn a jockey off for doing? These here troubles come from quite a different cause, and I'll tell you what 'tis. The fault lies in all you knock-kneed creatures that dursn't put out a hand to your own. You fish in the wrong place—that's what's the matter. Larkin, here, points to Brixham and blames it, and I do the same—not because Brixham ban't frightened to work Sunday, but because——'

He broke off and stuck his long, thin arm out over the parapet.

"There—there—that's Torquay, that is: the home of fat horses and fat lap-dogs and fat old maiden ladies—like the lilies that toil not neither do they spin! Go and fish there! Go and trawl in the villas and take back a bit of your own! You risk your lives to keep sole and turbot going on the plates of their tame cats—and you call yourselves men!"

"Stop that evil stuff, if you don't want to be struck from heaven for it, as you deserve," retorted the man with one leg. "'Tis a scandal to civilisation every time you open your mouth, and the things that you say wouldn't deceive a gull. You say they toil not and spin not over there; but didn't their fathers toil and spin?"

"Spin—yes, I'll swear they did," added another; "for half they rich people over the water be lifted up by cotton."

"And if the men as sweated and schemed for the money shouldn't leave it to their sons and daughters, where should they leave it?"

"That's your awful ignorance to ask such a question," answered Varwell. "Why, the State should have it. 'Tis the very backbone of Socialism that no one man has the right to keep another in idle fatness, just because he happens to be his son. If I make a fortune, be that any good reason why my sons

and darters should batten like maggots in a pear, and squander my money on luxuries, and lead idle, worthless lives, and not do so much good in the world as the man that brushes their boots or the woman that combs their hair? Everybody will have to justify his existence come presently, and them that don't work shan't eat; and no human being shall be allowed to crawl about after an old woman's poodle or wash her Persian cat, because manhood cries out against such a shameful waste of life. Such mean-minded curs as can do a flunkey's work, and mess about indoors all day with women servants—we shall turn them out into the fresh air and send 'em to sea or to the land; and if they sink under it, no loss—they'll be making room for their betters. And the women shall be taught self-respect also. It shall be a crime, I tell you, for one female to wait upon another unless she's sick. Only babbies shall be dressed and washed and have their hair done for 'em—not grown men and women. It makes the soul creep to think there be thousands and thousands of females living to-day as don't get into their own clothes. To hell with the gowns that a woman can't put on for herself! To hell with the men that can't shave their own chins! The world's boiling over with human energy—and we let it boil over. We let the young waste their youth and the old waste their money. We let millions of our fellow men and women earn their livings in a way that's enough to make their Maker blush, if He's not past blushing; and we let thousands more never lift one finger to help the world forward, but suffer them to cumber the roads with their rottenness and spend tons of money on their own toys and passions—human trash that would be better manuring the grass than walking on it. Larkin can talk of Sunday fishing. What's that to what a thousand over-fed, useless human slugs on t'other side of the Bay do every day of the week? We'm men and women in Brixham, at any rate, and we get our bread by the sweat of our brows; but there—pah!

half the folk on the earth can only live by fawning on t'other half. A puppet show, that's what 'tis; and the shop-keepers bow and scrape and wink at one another, and pretend they want nought so much as the custom of the villa people; and all the while they go on moving with the times and making new laws and building new buildings and catering for the masses. Why? Because they know the classes are doomed. The villa people will be at the end of their long rope before they can look round. They've got to go—like last year's bluebottles have got to go. They may sit drowsing in the sun a little while yet, and keep their fat on their idle bones; but there's a sharp frost coming—the frost of reason and justice and equality; and when the sun rises in a clear sky after that frost—what then? Why, they'll all be gone, like last year's prize stock."

"Yes," said the one-legged man; "and then them tradesmen, as be so bent on driving them away, will find they've killed the goose that laid the golden eggs. And damned fools they'll look; and I hope for one I shall live to see it. My son's in a shop over there, and I know what I'm talking about. The masses may make the trams pay—perhaps; but they won't make the shops that charge too much for everything pay. They traders will have to come down to honest profits and no more, then—same as the rest of the world will."

"Money's money, however, and 'tis no use your crying out against it, because the world can't go on without it now," argued the old man with the fan-shaped beard.

"It did once and it could again," declared Tumble-down Dick. "'Tis the root of all evil, and the root of all inequality. It puts a false value on things and makes class distinctions. They all rose out of it. If you go to the bottom of things, you'll find class be only another word for cash now. A rag and bone merchant can have all the Upper Ten in his house, if the house be big enough and full enough

of good cooks. I'm not saying anything against that, mind. There's no worth in the accident of coming from ancient stock. Sane people know that now. The worth is to be worthy of that ancient stock, and go one better than your grandfather, and two better than your great-grandfather, according to modern sense and modern wisdom and the advantages of the nineteenth century. In my case I've set my forebears a better example than they set me, thank God; and every fifth of November I get drunk as a fly—just for shame to think that a Varwell once carried a king on his shoulders and saved William from wetting his Dutch shoon."

He babbled on; then the dark and fiery Larkin took him to task.

"You to dare to talk of justice and wisdom and duty!" he said. "You to tell of setting an example! When was you ever known to do an honest day's work? When did you ever justify your outraged God for bringing you into the world? When did you ever toil or spin either—except to spin a tangle of wicked words and nonsense such as you be doing now?"

"A very proper question," answered the vagabond. "And don't you think I'm contented with myself, my dears, because I ban't. Far from it. I'm what a rotten society has made me—a failure; a signpost, showing how wrongly things be planned. When I'm sober, I can see myself so clear-eyed as the best among you, and 'tis a shameful sight, sure enough."

"You ought to be ashamed without a doubt."

"I am—ashamed of the nation that can let a man like me sleep under a haystack and go in rags while many another, here and there—as be clay to my gold—rides in purple and fine linen and bleats about the old religion and the new politics, and keeps the world back, and makes this generation a laughing-stock to them as shall follow us in the days of sense coming all too slowly."

He broke off and looked to sea.

"Be that John Major's boat?" he asked.

"Yes," answered a fisherman. "'Tis the 'Jack and Lydia' sure enough, back from the North Channel. She's home sooner than she meant to be."

"Don't let nobody say I don't work, then," continued Mr. Varwell. "Now I've got a very unpleasant job before me, and I'd far sooner any other man here had to do it; but I promised Brokenshire, and I'll keep my word. I've a message from Samuel for 'Holy John,' and it won't please him none too well. But I'm hoping he knows the facts and finds himself ready to face them. His great gift of faith will come in handy for once."

"He knows nothing at all," explained the one-legged man. "I was up over and passed the time of day with Mrs. Michelmore but yesterday. Of course she's taking rather a dark view of the business, as her manner is. In fact, she says that they'll never be married. She's sure they never will. She gave me a list from memory of every girl that's slipped here for the last twenty years; and 'twas rather a long one. But the point is that her brother had sailed too soon to get her telegraph or his daughter's letter. So 'twill all be news to him from start to finish."

"Then my job's like to be a good bit trickier than ever I thought," declared Tumbledown Dick. "So I'll go in the 'Sailor's Knot' and have a pint to brace myself afore the good man arrives."

CHAPTER XV

The crew of the 'Jack and Lydia' came ashore presently with some good fish caught on the way home.

Then, as John Major stumped up the steps and nodded to Mr. Memery, who awaited him, there stepped forward Dick. He bade the fisherman "Good morning," and beckoned with his yellow fingers.

"I want a few words with you, and they'd better be spoken out of the way," he said.

"Speak 'em here," answered John; "there's nothing I'm like to want to hear from you, Richard Varwell."

"You're right, skipper; 'tis the last thing you'll want to hear. But I promised to bring you a message, and I've put myself out of the way above a bit to do so; and I hope you'll kindly listen to me."

"Go on, then."

"Better come over here out of the row. I'm only thinking for your comfort, I assure you," answered Varwell.

"If you want my comfort, say what you've got to say quick. And let any hear it as care to hear it," answered Mr. Major.

Ears were pricked at this. Ned stood beside his father; Gilberd and Arthur Michelmore had just brought up the baskets of fish, and they, too, waited to learn what Tumbledown Dick might have to impart. Others were within earshot. Mr. Memery waited for a market, and buyers were dropping in. Mr. Peach happened to come down from his barking yard; he had business with John Major, and now approached. Thus a small crowd saw Lydia's father receive the news of her flight. Probably every man

among them knew it, save only the crew of the 'Jack and Lydia.'

"In a word," said Varwell, well accustomed to be the centre of a listening throng; "in a word, my friend, Sam Brokenshire, has unfortunately not been able to see with your eyes, Mr. Major. Youth cleaves to youth, and whether for sense or folly, the one thing about youth is that it must be doing. We older blades stop to think, and very often we think wrong; but the young—especially the young in love—— You're impatient to be gone, I see. Then here's the message: Brokenshire's took your daughter. They'll be married all right and regular as quickly as the law allows, and then they'll come back and settle down to do their part in the world as man and wife. But they can't ask you to the wedding, unfortunately, because——"

Major turned from him and stared at the people round about. Ned felt himself grow cold all over. He could not take his eyes off Varwell's face.

Now Dick shrugged his shoulders, declared that his friend Brokenshire had done well, and then laughed at John Major's blank countenance; but for this ill-timed amusement he paid upon the spot. While other men were explaining to the fisherman that his daughter had fled and that the 'Night Hawk' and her crew were away, none knew where, rough hands fell on Mr. Varwell, and Arthur Michelmore—a man of peace in most affairs—grew suddenly zealous for John Major and lost his temper at the insolence of Richard. He was a bachelor, and had long hidden at the bottom of his heart some shadowy image of Lydia as a possible helpmate in the future, when he could afford to take a wife. But it was on behalf of the skipper, not himself, that now he acted. The old man's rueful face impressed Arthur, and some fragment of imagination touched him as he gazed upon that stricken countenance. Then he looked at Mr. Varwell's ragged beard, impudent eyes, and bibulous nose; whereupon a rare though furious

wrath shook him into violence. The fit passed speedily; but in its passage it spurred Arthur to a deed. He clenched his fist, rushed at Tumbledown Dick and hit him full and fair in the middle of his ragged waistcoat. The victim was quite unprepared for such an assault, and went down like a straw before the stroke. His hat flew in one direction, his cigarette in another, and he himself, collapsing backward, fell head first and heels in air over the quay. Happily for Varwell he missed the gunwale of a boat below and soused into four feet of water.

It was the supreme action of Arthur's life, and one of the most unpleasant experiences in Richard's. But Dick touched bottom, waded to the steps and came ashore again.

A roar of laughter greeted him as he ascended to the quay with his rags clinging to his thin body and his long hair and beard streaming; but he laughed as loudly as the rest, shook himself among them like a dog, picked up his hat, and asked for his cigarette.

Major, Ned, and a few men had moved along the quay. Gilberd was left to see the fish sold. A crowd collected round Varwell and jeered at his plight.

"Thank the Lord I wasn't wearing my gold watch this morning," he said; "and since Arthur wanted me to have a bath, he ought to have knocked me over t'other side of the quay, where they ban't quite so many dead fish at the bottom. And now one of you good, working Christians had better show what you be worth and lend me a few dry clothes while this here court suit be dried."

None offered to serve him, so Dick crossed the road and entered the 'Sailor's Knot.'

For such a customer Mr. Munday reluctantly bestirred himself, and presently Dick, clad in some of the landlord's most ancient clothes, marched radiant into the world once more.

"We live and learn," he said to the men on the quay who greeted his return. "Now, to-day I've learned that 'tis a great mistake to carry other men's

messages. You see, all that I wanted for to do was to let the blow fall so light on Holy John as possible—to spare him, in fact, everything that could be spared him. And what happens? He turns his back on me as if I was a bad smell, and that yellow-haired, mild young tea-drinker, Arthur Michelmore, suddenly finds his manhood and scats me tail over head into the water! I'd never have thought 'twas in him. But human nature can still surprise me seemingly—much though I've larned about it."

At home John Major met his weeping sister and heard, not only the truth, but the reason why the truth had missed him until now. To seek Lydia was vain, for she might be hidden at any port in England; while any news of the 'Night Hawk' must be equally difficult to glean. His powerlessness chiefly smote Mr. Major. Only one man in Brixham knew where Brokenshire was to be found, and that man, godless though he might be, was the least likely to sell his friend. Nor, indeed, did Lydia's father feel in any strong mood to stir himself about her. He felt her action as a thing beyond power of belief. For a girl brought up as she had been and educated and instructed as she had been; for a girl who had enjoyed advantages of learning and religion; for her mother's daughter to do this thing, staggered Mr. Major with the force of a revelation. He was sore and he was much startled. That the close, sacred relation between Lydia and himself, that a tie extending through her whole short life, could be broken so lightly and so unreasonably, filled the fisherman with amazement. To see that what had happened was for the best, exceeded even his eye of faith, because, in John's judgment, there promised no shadow of happiness for the wife of any dishonest and irreligious man; but a time came when Mr. Major's roaming and grief-stricken spirit reached the limits of its chain, and the old rivets of his faith stood the test. Even this event could not loosen the shackles or free him

from his unreason. Before Lydia returned to Brixham as the wife of Brokenshire, her father had satisfied himself that this thing was destined to happen —for purposes by him not understood.

"'Tis evil," he said to his son, "and, as such, I'll not condone it or meddle in it, and I'll not know Lydia or own her any more until her husband is found steady on the side of righteousness. Evil happens in the world, and it's suffered to happen; but remember this, Ned: the Lord has the last word. Therefore I'll not rage vainly like the heathen, and make bad worse. The reason for many and many a thing that happens to men and women is hidden from our short range of sight; but faith have got something grander to do than look for reasons. 'Tis enough that we know nought happens without a reason; and that though sometimes the reason be showed us clear enough, yet oftentimes it is not. For you and me and Aunt Emma, we've got to take this terrible hard stroke in a right spirit. The power has been took from me to stop the marriage, else I would stop it. And Lydia will marry him, and we must go on and watch what the Lord means to do with her; and we must pray for her; and we must not lose a chance to help her in the future if God offers us a chance to do it."

As for Ned, his mild, forgiving heart felt little emotion beyond one of great interest to know how Lydia would feel as the wife of Brokenshire. He perceived that she must have been magnificently fond of Samuel to do so great a thing; and, on the whole, he felt rather proud of his sister's pluck. He looked forward to meeting her again, and wondered whether she would be much changed. He was quite overcome by the strangeness of feeling that Brokenshire would be his brother; yet he rather rejoiced in the thought.

Ned proposed to ask his father whether he might visit Lydia when she came home, but he desisted from his intention. He was shy, and decided that

he would not risk a refusal. Mr. Major had explicitly stated that he did not intend to know Lydia any more until her husband changed his manner of life; and therefore it was probable that further friendly relations between Lydia and her brother would be forbidden. Ned, therefore, kept his own intentions a secret in this matter. He went next day to see Arthur Michelmore, who lodged with a man and his wife at Overgang, and was subsequently able to report that Sam Brokenshire's house began to shine like the sun in the hands of painters and paper-hangers.

"He's having the place done up inside and out seemingly," said Ned. "I met Mr. Peach outside, and he told me that Brokenshire was spending twelve pounds on the house and as much more for furniture."

"That's true enough," declared Emma Michelmore, "for I was up over myself, to see Mrs. Gilberd, before you came back, and I ran against that busy man, Titus Peach; and nothing would do but I must hear what he was planning for his nephew. And, despite all the bitter load of misery on my heart, I couldn't deny that no bride in a small way was ever known to go into a better little house and find more flame-new things around her. Titus had twenty pounds from Samuel Brokenshire to spend, and he's added five, being the young man's uncle; and for my part I never would have thought that five-and-twenty sovereigns could work such wonders."

"What did Mr. Peach have to say about it?" asked John Major.

"Nothing," answered his sister. "Said nought and knew nought. You know the caution of the man. He wouldn't tread on a snail till he've looked all round it. Not a word he dropped concerning them, and when I began about the family luck, he ventured to believe 'twas more than time the luck changed. He even thought it was going to do so. He wants for me to go and see his garden and things, and

I'd even promised—foolish though it may sound; but then this blow fell, and I knew too well, that it was a reminder sent to me to remember my place and not go seeking to gad about in flower gardens. Flowers, indeed! 'Leave the flowers to the butterflies,' I said to Peach last time we met and he asked me again. 'The only flowers that ever come within my sight be at funerals.' But he wouldn't have it. For an oldish creature he's far too cheerful, and even this tragic come-along-of-it wouldn't shake a strong word out of him. There's some dreadful doom hanging over Titus so like as not; for when a man gets up to his age without a blow and without a care, it all comes to once, and he's generally in the dust afore he knows it—never to lift his battered head again."

CHAPTER XVI

When next John Major went to sea, he stopped from shore a fortnight, and during that time the 'Night Hawk' came back to port. Lydia returned to Brixham as she left it, by water; but her state had changed, for she was now the wife of Samuel Brokenshire.

Into the little street of Overgang she came, and from the first applied herself very thoroughly to the cares and duties of a fisherman's wife. To the work she brought energy, excellent home training, and an education superior to her station. She felt indeed, not seldom, that much of her knowledge must evermore be wasted now; but that looked a small matter set against possession of Samuel. Him she loved with all her young heart, and nothing could shadow her pride and wifely joy in the new dignities.

Her neighbours held off awhile; then, finding that Lydia gave herself neither airs nor graces, went to the other extreme and forced their friendship. The romance of the situation stimulated Overgang and formed a great topic for debate. Some held that John Major was to blame in his attitude; others, remembering Brokenshire's irregularities, considered his father-in-law justified. The future of Samuel particularly interested Overgang, and his friends, who were many, declared that, after this great step in his career, he would, without doubt, abandon the picturesque errors of his youth and take his place in the ranks of responsible manhood. Others, less sanguine or less kindly disposed, did not imagine that the fisherman would change, and prophesied no fair things for Lydia Brokenshire.

To his sister Ned presently came upon a Sunday afternoon. By stealth he visited her; but she welcomed him with rejoicing, and made him stay longer than he intended. His shadowy anger against her she quickly smothered; he was, indeed, soon on her side, and he even promised to do what he could with their father. Lydia was full of Samuel's goodness; and since he happened to be out, she could descant on this fine theme to her heart's content.

"He's all and a thousand times more than all I thought him," she declared. "Oh, Ned, I'm prouder and prouder of his cleverness and his pluck and his sense! If father only knew the man he was—but he must know; I'll never lie easy in my bed till he does know—and always ready to do anything to please me—Sam, I mean. He went to church with me this morning, and I was terrible disappointed father didn't see him there."

But Ned had not reached the point of these generalities. He wanted particular information, and bombarded Lydia with questions as to her plot, her hiding-place, her manner of flight, her wedding, and the occasion of her return.

She told him how she had departed, and how lived in lodgings at Weymouth, while the 'Night Hawk' had worked at sea and made various unsatisfactory experiments in the use of the flying trawl for mackerel. She then described her marriage.

"Sam wanted the registry office, but I would have it done in a church, and he made no fuss and came like a bird. And Mr. Trust and Mr. Mutter came too; and Saul Mutter gave me away. And Sam surprised me wonderfully at the last moment, for he'd brought his best clothes unknown to me, and he looked so fine and I was such a dowdy that I could have been quite vexed about it. Then the four of us went and had a little wedding breakfast at an inn, and by three in the afternoon we'd set sail for home."

"Aunt Emma said you ought to have come back by train."

"Sam wanted to; but somehow I wouldn't. I'd got a feeling that as I went, so I'd come back; and I think he was glad I chose that way. Besides, the expense! We've got to be careful, I promise you, Ned. A lot has been spent, and Sam won't let me touch a penny of my own little bit of money. Come and see the house now—everything new and bright. He had it all done while we were away for a surprise; and a great surprise it was. All the same, I hope presently that we shall get a semi-detached house at least—with just a scrap of garden. Overgang's rather—— Though the friendliness of everybody is wonderful."

She shrugged her shoulders, and Ned agreed with her.

"Of course he'll soon raise himself in the land and take a better place."

Then she planned a pleasure for her brother.

"Next time you come home I'll ask Deborah and Tom," said Lydia. "We'll have a good feast. Tom is after my husband to let him go to sea with him for just one trip some day; and if Mr. Honeywill has nothing to say against it, I expect Sam will let him go."

"'Twill be meat and drink to Tom," declared the fisherboy, "and I'm sure 'tis very kind of you to think of axing Deb and me to tea some time, Lyddy. I shall be very glad to come, and right well you know Deb will be too; but I'm just a thought uncertain as to father."

"You're here now," she said. "I suppose you wouldn't have come without his leave? That's why I was so deeply glad and thankful to see you. For I said to myself, 'If he'll let Ned come, surely it can't be very long before he'll forgive us and come himself.'"

"I don't say that he wouldn't let me come," answered the boy; "for that matter, why shouldn't

I come? We'm brother and sister, and—and—but there 'tis: I felt 'twas just a possible thing that father might say 'no' if I axed him outright, so I didn't."

Lydia was disappointed.

"Then my hope's vain," she said. "At any rate, don't do anything again that can annoy him. I've done enough, and I should be very sorry to turn him from you as well as from Sam and me. Tell him just what you've done and just what you've seen, when you go home. Hide nothing. If he forbids you to come again, then mind you do just what he says, Ned. But still, I hope he won't—I hope he won't. It's lovely to see you sitting there, eating in my house."

Before Ned went away his brother-in-law returned, and greeted him with friendship.

"How's the governor, and how's he standing up against this shock?" was his first question—a question that Lydia had not put.

Ned's command of language was not equal to answering with much delicacy or diplomacy. Natural tact he had, but it could not modify the truth.

"He's very downcast about it still; but all the same he knows it was for the best, because nothing can happen that ban't. Only he doesn't see the reason, and he's going to keep away from the pair of you till light shines on him and he's told what to do."

"He'll come round—such a sensible and far-seeing man. You tell him that we're so happy as a pair of song-birds, and that I'm turned good as gold, and might actually have been seen and heard to church this morning if he'd been there and used his eyes and ears."

"He's been reading the Bible all day to old Blight."

"I know—will read him to death—so his wife whispered. But a very good death, no doubt, if it has to be. Well, you can tell him that I'm a reformed creature, and that the 'Night Hawk' is quite a reformed craft, and will never have a shadow upon

her name no more. Though how such a straight boat and such a straight crew was ever so badly misunderstood by your father will always be a puzzle to me. He must go his way and I'll go mine; but if he's not under my roof and proud of me for a son-in-law afore we're all a year older, then the fault will be his. And you can tell him that Lydia's happy as a queen—can't he, Lyddy? And that I'll be a good husband to her, and think of her welfare and happiness from now for ever, just as much as he did for your mother. And if there's any more he wants to know, or wishes altered, he's only got to say the word and I'll do everything in my power to oblige him."

"And what living man could speak fairer or kindlier?" asked Ned's sister.

Primed with these opinions and messages, he departed presently, and Lydia kissed him and Sam shook his hand and gave him a cigarette. The boy returned home much impressed with what he had seen and heard. Lydia seemed altogether more interesting and important than of old; while as for his brother-in-law, Ned felt a sort of pride in being henceforth related to such a personage.

He told his father everything, and did not even forget the number of rooms in Lydia's house or the pattern of the wall-paper in the parlour. This led to a confession, for Mrs. Michelmore inadvertently corrected Ned upon some minor particulars, and thus revealed the fact that she, too, had seen the house. She had not told Mr. Major that this was so, and now, upon his questioning gaze and lifted brows, she hastened to explain that she had indeed dropped in —on the day before the Brokenshires returned home. To end the importunities of Titus Peach, she had allowed herself to do this frivolous thing.

"For reasons best known to himself the man pestered me to see the place, and to be rid of him I did so. But that was afore the pair came back. And as for the future, John, your word's my law, as

it always will be in family matters, so long as any of us be left. If you command that I'm not to visit my niece, I won't visit her; if you say I am to do so, then I shall."

The master took no notice of his sister, but addressed a question to his son.

"Why for did you go up over to 'em without asking me first?" he inquired.

Ned hesitated; then told the truth.

"Because I was terrible interested to see Lyddy again, and I felt that very likely you wouldn't let me go, father."

John nodded. He pardoned some of Ned's replies by virtue of the honesty behind them. The boy often did wrong in his father's eyes, as a youngster of fifteen was sure to do; but the truth he always told, and their differences were few and of short duration. Only in the matter of his life at sea had Ned ever attempted any sort of deception, but that was for John Major's sake.

"Upon the whole," said his father, "'twill be better and more seemly for this household to do what the conscience directs. 'Tisn't a case where I have a right to order any among us. At least, so I see it. For my part, as one cruelly wronged by a daughter who has had nought but love and kindness from me since the day they put her in my hands—for my part, I say, I shall hold off from them, because I've got my self-respect, and I've got my own spoken word behind me. I made my views very clear to both of 'em, and neither will expect to have any truck with me. Not even Brokenshire's cheek would rise to that. 'Tis for him to show I'm mistaken; and if Lydia wants to win back my respect, she knows how best to set about it. Forgive her I have, because I'm ordered so to do by my Lord and Saviour; but a great lot of sorrow and displeasure at her undaughterly and froward conduct will be marked by me. I can have nothing whatsoever to do with her or her husband yet awhile. Upon that

subject I'm fixed and shall not change. Still, I don't mean to go beyond myself in this matter. You'll do what you think right, Emma; and as for you, my son, 'tisn't for you to take my burden upon your shoulders. You can know her as formerly; and since the least of us have our measure of power, you can use what sense and proper feeling you've got to help that man to do right."

"Thank you, father."

"As for me," said Emma, "I shall do the same as you, John. I've got my grievances too, God knows, against Lydia, though they look small beside yours. But she've forgotten how to treat a good aunt these many days, and I can't forget she suited herself and went off on the very day I axed her to do me a favour and go to a sort of party to see Mr. Peach's grotto. No doubt 'twould all have been a dreadful failure; still she did ought to have gone; and so I'll cool off on my side and let her see the world don't blow all one way, like the west wind. If us can't have giving and taking between niece and aunt, then all I say is that the rising generation will be a selfish and horrid race—as they certainly promise to be; and I hope I shan't be left much over my three score and ten to clash with 'em. They'll be no better than a lot of hungry sea-gulls fighting for the best pieces, by the promise of 'em; and when their time arrives, the likes of me and the maidenly daughters and motherly wives of the old days will be much better dead and buried from the wrath to come. So I shan't go anigh Lydia—not for nine months any way. But I dare say afore then she'll find the older generation has got its uses even yet, and knows a thing or two they don't teach at school. Perhaps though, afore long, these here toads of girls as be coming on around us nowadays, without manners or modesty or anything but the stuff they've sucked up from the school-board—perhaps they'll have no use for children when they grow up; and then the whole human race will die out, owing to the men

turning against the class of flat and harsh and bony and pushing females that you'll see ramping round everywhere in another generation or two."

"You mustn't let your tongue run away with you as you do," answered her brother. "Here's Ned all eyes and ears, wondering what the mischief you mean. But be as 'twill, there's no harm can come of your standing off from my daughter for a bit. She'll find what home meant presently, and what a good, patient, work-loving aunt meant. Let her work now and taste the meaning of work, and get health of mind through it to see the great wrong she has done in disobeying me."

"Yes," added Lydia's aunt; "and if it don't come through sense, 'tis bound to come through sorrow. Is Samuel Brokenshire going straight because he's married—a man ever crooked as a sickle? She'll wish her cake was dough again afore she's a year older; and even if he'd been a different sort and so trustworthy as yourself, it must have come out all wrong in the end. We'm a cankered race; and to suppose that your children were likely to make successful marriages, is as foolish as to fancy that fish will ever again fetch what it did in the 'sixties."

END OF BOOK I

BOOK II

CHAPTER I

Another spring had come and the labour of the time occupied all hands at the haven. None was busier during this season than Titus Peach, and though anxieties of a personal character hung heavy upon his mind, yet so much cried to be done at his place of business that he had no leisure to dwell on private problems.

The barking yard lay under a grey cliff upon the harbour road, northerly. Here, in a sheltered nook half-way up the hill, Titus prospered. In the midst was a wide open space of cemented floor sloping at a gentle angle to the sea. Round about stood wooden buildings, where the sails were stored until their turn came; in one corner appeared a boiler and cauldron; and at hand were barrels containing Mr. Peach's stock in trade. Above the spot there towered two lofty masts with running gear. The place was a harmony of red and yellow colours.

Sails, that looked no larger than bright autumn leaves at sea, extended mighty areas when spread here on the cement floor. Even a jib proved a very considerable piece of canvas stretched for treatment in the barking yard.

Now a big mainsail filled the entire cemented space while Mr. Peach and an assistant boy laboured upon it.

In the cauldron was brewed a decoction of oak bark, that spouted like strong tea from a leather pipe when the cock was turned; the barrels contained Stockholm tar, grease, and ochre of different shades. Fishermen who brought their sails to this annual process of preservation, selected their own colour;

and so the harmony of a fleet at sea was secured by divers hues that ranged from the favourite nankeen yellow to a russet red.

Cased in tarpaulin trousers that were fastened under his armpits, protected also by an old jersey and an aged deerstalker cap that fastened in flaps under his chin, Mr. Peach paddled about on the canvas, like an unlovely insect crawling over an orange lily. He carried a mop and a pail, and he scattered a boiling mixture of rich colour round about him as he went. The preparation was of that fine yellow most popular with Brixham fishermen. It ran streaming and steaming over the great sail, and there was no sound but the slop, slop of the two mops. The hissing liquid spread by them trickled in great fingers over the sail, and Mr. Peach's straw-shod feet padded, with a sort of sucking splash, like a goose in mud, as he stumped about yard by yard over the canvas. Anon more dressing became necessary, and with the boy's aid Titus brewed a few more gallons. He was said to possess a secret hidden from any Brixham barker but himself, and some alleged that an addition other than tar, grease, or tan, gave to a Peach dressing its distinguished and durable quality. He did not deny it; but it was his way neither to deny nor affirm. In truth the man's sole secret was to leave nothing to subordinates, but supervise all with magisterial thoroughness and knowledge. From mixing of ingredients to application of them, Mr. Peach took the sole responsibility of his barking yard. He charged a little more than lesser men; but he could afford to do so, and experience, extending over three decades, had convinced the fishermen that Titus ensured their canvas an extra lease of life.

Now he looked over the boy's work, brought him back to a point or two, and then, one side of the great sail being completely dressed, it was dragged over and the other side similarly treated.

"'Tis a very good thing," said Mr. Peach, "that

the weather has kept so brisk and dry, for this here mainsail will be ready for Mr. Major by dawn. Providence knows its own without a doubt, just as the opposite party is always said to do so. And 'twas only to be expected that such a man shouldn't be kept off the sea at such a time an hour longer than could be helped."

He dabbed away steadily, and soaked every thread of the canvas.

"Ten year old, and good for ten more—thanks to me," he said, regarding the sail with friendship.

Then appeared, suddenly, Samuel Brokenshire about his own affairs. He was off the sea, and the time had come when the 'Night Hawk's' feathers called for attention from Mr. Peach.

Sam lent a hand with the gear on the great masts, and soon John Major's fine mainsail was dragged dripping aloft for the east wind to work upon it. Then a foresail took its place, and Titus continued his work while he talked to Sam.

"If you bring your sails come Tuesday, I'll not keep you waiting more than I can help, but you know what 'tis now. If I had ten pair o' arms and ten pair o' legs, I couldn't keep pace with the work. 'Tis Brixham's way never to look ahead. Nobody thinks nothing about barking till the moment comes; then—lo and behold!—everybody wants the thing done in a minute, and nobody can be kept waiting for anybody else. And how I get through and carry all the work off without making enemies, I wonder more and more from year to year."

"Nobody but you could do it," said Sam. "'Tis your high cleverness, uncle, to keep 'em all friends and all satisfied. And if you were less than the man you are, and just rough and ready and like that 'take-it-or-leave-it' chap t'other side the bay, why, even then they'd all come to you—all with any brains in their heads; for well they know that none can tan a sail within a mile of you."

Mr. Peach was gratified.

"What you say is true enough, no doubt," he admitted.

"And everybody says it. And what's more, Uncle Titus, you ought to begin to think of finding somebody to hand down your secret to. Because 'twill be a very bad day for Brixham if 'tis lost."

Mr. Peach told his boy to go out of earshot; then he broke a private grievance to Samuel.

"I suppose you've come to choose your colour? And you're welcome to the best I can do, as your mother's son always has been. But now list to me. I've found myself a good bit niffed of late in a certain quarter. Time flies—and a lot of things fly with it. We ban't none of us getting younger, and, in some directions, a man up fifty be saying 'good-bye' to a lot more than he'll ever get the chance to welcome. In a word, she still holds off—Mrs. Michelmore, I mean. I've made my intentions perfectly clear. I've even gone into figures. She's had tea in the parlour once, and in the grotto once. Still she says there don't seem any call to do anything definite, owing to the badness of the times and the shortness and uncertainty of life, and so on. But I had her there. 'Guy Fawkes, my dear creature!' I said to her—John was at sea at the time—'Guy Fawkes!' I said, ''tis just because of that very thing —'tis because of the shortness of life and the uncertainty that I ax for you to make up your mind. I can wait as well as any man, and better than some,' I told her. 'I've waited for a wife till winter was at the door, and a few more years at this stage be nothing; but the latter end often comes like a thief in the night,' I said, 'and I don't want mine to find me still in the single state.' She listened, and declared that if I was one of them rash, hasty men, I'd better seek elsewhere."

"Run away with her!" said Samuel. "I'll lend you my boat."

"I don't want you to make fun about it," replied his uncle. "Things are coming to a climax, and

I've decided not to wait after next autumn. But if I can get something definite sooner, so much the better. Now it strikes me that a man with your experience and cheek—— Besides, your wife's her niece—eh?"

Samuel winked.

"I see; but 'tis a kicklish thing for the younger generation to go meddling with the love affairs of their grandfathers and grandmothers. However, for you, Uncle Titus, I'll do that, and more than that."

"And I'll tan your sails for nought," said his uncle. "Yes, I will. I know the one task be harder than t'other, and if by any cunning word you could fetch her round and get her to say something final, 'twould be well worth the cost of your canvas."

"A bargain then."

"Not that I'm hopeful," continued Titus. "To get either 'yes' or 'no' from some women be as hard as to fetch figs from thistles. I'm losing heart about her. She's very fond of saying, 'Ah, that'll happen when Start Bay's open!' She says it whenever you name an unlikely thing. And it looks to me that she'll make up her mind, where my business is concerned, then, and not sooner."

"Start Bay! I thought it was open," exclaimed the poacher, winking again.

Mr. Peach shook his head.

"You're a rogue," he said, "and 'tis a great grief to me that you are. A good nephew, but a bad man; and you owe it to me and your wife and your coming child to turn over a new leaf."

"That's all right. Words don't break any bones. Let 'em find me in Start Bay before they lecture me."

"And that they will do sooner or later. You can't defy a whole country-side. The Watch Committee knows all about you, Samuel. There'll be a terrible ugly day of reckoning. And that brings me back to Emma Michelmore. 'Tis doubtful, after all, whether you'd be the best to have a tell with her."

"I've promised; and you've promised to tan the

sails. I'll go up next time the old man's to sea. I've long wanted an excuse to tackle her, and I may do some good for myself as well as you. And Lyddy shall come too. She've often hinted at going over to see her aunt, because she never thought Mrs. Michelmore would keep away; so we'll go together, and I'll put in a good stroke for you and tell her what a damned old fool she is to keep such a man as you hanging about."

"Be careful," said Titus; "and before all else don't use language. At an impatient moment—more shame to me—I rapped out an oath in her company. Last winter 'twas, and I thought I'd lost her for good and all. 'Tis along of living with her brother, whose conversation is no more than 'yea' and 'nay,' in the Bible phrase."

"And what he says he sticks to," added Samuel. "Holy, I grant, but hard as the nether millstone too. Not a hand lifted all these months. Not a word or a message, though he knows he may be a grandfather any minute."

"'Tis you, not your wife. He's spoken and won't draw back. The remedy's in your hands."

Sam's blue eyes grew sulky.

"We'll see—we'll see," he answered. "I'll wear him down yet. And I'll go my own way also."

"Well, use your best wits on my behalf, and you won't hurt yourself anyway," concluded his uncle. "If I gather that woman and make her into Mrs. Peach, there'll be another on our side against your father-in-law. In fact, he'll stand alone. And now you'd best to come and look at my ochre and choose your colour afore the daylight's faded out."

Twilight was at hand, and gentle easterly breezes roamed under a red sky, toyed with the smoke from many hearths and spread it in a blue veil over the outlines of the houses. Tender dusk was down, and lights already twinkled through the waning light. Above the barking yard ascended Overgang, clustered close, lifting to points, threaded by steep

stairways like some ancient rock village on a southern hill.

Samuel chose a genial auburn tone for his canvas: the colour of the dead brake-fern.

"I've painted the town red in my young days," he declared, "and why for shouldn't I paint my sails red now? 'Tis a very good shade for a night hawk's wings any way. And you remember, Uncle Titus, that if you want to do the same that I done, and take your widow by force and carry her off out of reach of her righteous brother, my boat's always at your service."

"'Tis the very last thing I'd be wishful to do," said Mr. Peach. "She's not the sort of woman ever to be thought of in such a lawless way. When you get to her ear, remember her bent of mind, and remind her of the man I am and the views I hold. And touch on the house and garden and the comforts of having your own well of water, and the easy steps up to the station. These things all carry great weight with her, naturally, and I've dwelt on 'em many and many a time. But she's prone to forget them again, so soon as I'm out of sight."

"I'll rub it all in, I promise you. And now you'd best to come up and have a cup of tea with us. Lyddy said that I must be sure and make you."

Mr. Peach was very fond of his niece and he never refused her invitations.

"Nothing will please me better," he said. "Your wife be one in a thousand, and little enough you're worthy of such a clever creature."

Then Titus stopped work for the day, emerged from his greasy and ochreous tarpaulins, and presently climbed beside Samuel to Mr. Brokenshire's lofty dwelling.

CHAPTER II

On a day in July there came a holiday for Ned, and he spent it to splendid purpose at Berry Farm and Berry cliffs. He and Deborah roamed through many familiar haunts, and at last, when noon was far past and they had eaten their meal of bread and cheese and cake, they sat together high up on broken ground west of the Head. Beneath there fell a steep footpath to the sea, and here there toiled an old man, who came and went with a wheelbarrow. He brought up seaweed from the olive-green and umber masses ranged by the tide along grey beaches below, and he piled the treasure at a point three parts up the cliff. Hither a horse and cart would presently come and remove the weed to the land above.

"Sit here on the green side and tell a bit, Deb," said the boy. "What a brave sight 'tis to watch old Warner fetching up that seaweed."

"Father thinks that 'tis the only excuse for the sea—to help fat the land. Yet our Tom's happy enough upon it. Such a sailor he is now! You can spot him for a fisherman a mile off; and he rolls in his going as if he'd always got a slanting deck under his feet. 'Why, you'm more of a sea-dog than Brokenshire himself!' father said to him last time he was ashore. He's learning his business very fast."

"Does Samuel take him out by night?" asked Ned.

"No; father won't suffer that, though Tom's always praying for it. But Mr. Brokenshire don't really want my brother in his boat. 'Tis too small a vessel to need a boy. And he declares he can't do with Tom when he's at night-fishing."

Ned said nothing. He knew the ill repute of

his brother-in-law; but it was none of his business, and he never spoke of it or listened to others when they did so. Indeed, the matter concerned his thoughts even less than usual to-day. He had risen that morning full of enterprise, and his purpose argued no small precocity for a boy. But he stood firm, and now prepared to approach his task. A sort of fear drove him to it, as he presently explained.

The place where they sat was lonely and close hidden. Days of heat began to scorch the sea-facing cliffs and wither the small creatures that found roothold in them. They seemed to gasp and shrivel and make haste to set their little seeds before perishing. Below broke the ripple of a still sea, and the limestone cliffs shed off a milky opalescence into the pure green water. Where Ned and the girl sat the slope was coated with close herbage and trefoils, starred with pink centaury, danced over by skaking grasses and the frail loveliness of cathartic flax. Within reach of Ned's hand a rare and lovely flower opened its golden eye amid snow-white petals. The cushion of it was a grey green, and it dwelt tucked into a cleft of the limestone.

He twisted the white rock-rose about until the petals had fallen, and only the golden eye of it remained. Then he flung it from him. A grasshopper made husky music hard by; bees droned at their sweet business; insects flashed and gleamed hither and thither; butterflies opened and shut their wings on the sunny stones and blossoms of the bramble.

Ned was alert for a long time; then he began to approach his subject in a devious way.

"You see, Deb, you mustn't think because I'm a fisherman now that I shall always be one. I know you feel the same as me, but when you think upon it, you must remember 'tis all only a passing thing. Though I'm to sea all my time, I don't belong to it, and I shall break off from it presently."

"No need to tell me that, Ned."

"Yes, but there is. You'll know why in a moment.

Of course, for father's sake, things must go on as they're going yet awhile. He doesn't know the truth about it, and I don't mean him to, for if he did, he'd feel terrible sad and cast down. 'Tis his great want in life for all Majors to be fishermen. I can't see why they should myself, but they have been for countless years, so father says, and I'm the last of the breed; and so I'll stick to it yet awhile for father's sake. And I'd rather bite my tongue out than let him know how I feel about it. When first I went to sea, I couldn't help showing it a bit; but I hide it now very clever."

"From everybody but me, Ned."

"That's it, Deborah. 'Tis that I'm coming to. I began to get afraid as you'd think with the rest, and suppose the sea was all I wanted. And then what would you have felt?"

She looked up at him from under the blue sunbonnet that she always wore. She crossed and re-crossed her feet in their small shoes.

"'Twasn't for me to feel about it. At least——"

"But you did feel—if 'twas only to feel sorrow for me—a little—eh, Deb?"

"Of course I did. I'd feel sorry for anybody forced for to lead a life that was all against the collar. I felt sorry enough for Tom when I used to see him plodding the fields with his eyes and his thoughts on the water."

"But more for me—more for me. Say more for me, Deb!"

"Yes—more for you."

The boy answered nothing, and neither spoke for a little while. The dawn of mighty things fluttered in their hearts, but so gradual had been that day-spring, so slowly had it risen out of their united childhood, that neither yet wholly realised it. Ned now spoke great words—yet half that they meant and the height and depth and fulness of them were hidden from him, for he was still a boy.

"Deb," he began presently, "you and me are

sixteen year old. And you be a child still, as maidens should be so young as that; but with me 'tis very different. I've come to be a man—full growed. Yes, 'tis solemn truth. The sea have done that for me, whatever else it may have done. And now—now I'm filled with wonderful thoughts that work in me like barm in dough—and you'm in the midst of them, Deb. Oh, Deb, darling, I think of nobody else but you!"

She shivered strangely and blinked—gave half a look at him—love and alarm mingled. But she said nothing, only locked her little brown hands tight in her lap.

"And I've got in a terrible fright, Deb; and 'tis fright making me say what I'm saying. I—I—you see, you're ashore and I'm afloat, and God, He knows how many people see you when I'm away; and it's got to be a dread and terror with me each time I sail out o' sight of land that somebody—better, of course, than me, and wiser, and well-to-do, and a landsman—in fact—can't you see—how the fear of hearing you'm gone——? That's why I say these things, though 'tis too soon for you to hear 'em. Yet I'll swear some other chap cleverer than me will come along and say 'em in a minute, better than I can; and then I shall get back from a voyage and hear that you—that you are walking out with somebody, Deb. 'Twould be the last straw for my life. I couldn't stand it, Deb."

He stopped, and she spoke with a small voice that fluttered.

"Oh, Ned, how wonderful—how wonderful to hear you speak like a grown man!"

"That's it," he said. "That's what I can't do, though I wish to God I could; for I'll never want to speak like one more than now. 'Tis man's love, Deborah. I ban't too young to feel that. I love you—ban't nonsense and trash—I swear 'tis faithful, true love—else what can it be? The very name of you be a light to my dark nights. I say it

under my breath to myself when I'm watching. I say it when the bolts cry out or the boom creaks—I say it out loud then, because the sound's hidden from all ears but mine. I love you, Deb; I swear it can't be nothing else—your voice and your li'l grey eyes and your mouth. Specially your mouth. And you kissed me once—remember that—and I've never forgot it all these years and years, if you have. Don't—don't, for God's sake, take a grown man when I'm away to sea, Deb. Don't do that till we'm grown a bit ourselves and you'm wife-old. And I'll soon be old enough to set up a home for you and all that. 'Tis all nothing to me beside you, but 'tis part of being married, I see. Only don't let somebody older than me do it for you; don't let a man come and take you while I'm to sea. I couldn't bear it, Deb; I should kill him."

He prated of manly emotions, but did not dream how much older the girl was than himself, or how she glowed to her little heart's heart before this worship. She gasped; she looked up at the sun. Life had put a crown of joy suddenly upon her young head. Every word that he faltered was beautiful to her: his humility, his fear, his promises; the name of her spoken at sea by night while she slept. How much she had to tell him too! But she could not begin in a moment. She knew not where to begin; and where was her voice? She was quite silent. To her it seemed that if he only looked and listened, everything round about would answer for her. The bees made mellow music and voiced her; the gulls cried out her happiness in their laughter; the grasshoppers chirruped it; the waves danced and flashed it. Heaven spread above her, and the great westering light aloft was not too large to tell of her delight.

She yearned to touch his hand. Her love tingled in her little veins; her voice throbbed with pride.

"Ned! To think—such a small, poor thing as me! No—no—'tis because you're not a man at all

yet, though you think you are—and yet right well I know you're very nearly a man. Oh, Ned, how beautiful!"

"'Tis proper grown-up love, Deborah."

"For ever and ever and ever I'll love you, you blessed Ned!"

"You can? Truth? And can wait till I get away from the sea?"

"Sea or land—what's that to me? I love you—and long, long I've loved you! And I'll wait for ever for you, Ned."

Now she was more fervent far than the boy, for her sixteen years meant more than his. She woke him a little, and at last he kissed her—as a cherub, not as a lover kisses. But her ardour was a thought earthier. She held him tight, and fired him with the pressure of her slim figure till the world spun round merrily for them. She would not let him go; she made him hold his arm round her; he felt her cheek pressed up to his.

He grew almost dazed and drunken with this mighty experience, and she said, again and again, that 'twas only his arm round her and his cheek against hers that made her understand what had happened.

Their love was artless and sweet as dayspring on the sea. The light that presently painted the cliffs with the tender tones of ripe fruit spread over them also, and their hearts throbbed in the roseal gentleness of evening. They could not part; they could not move.

"If us might but sit here just loving each other for ever, through sunlight and moonlight!" said Deborah.

"If but we might! But there's man's work to be done, Deb. And I swear you've made me feel terrible manlike to-day. But not manlike enough to tell it out, eh? You don't bid me to tell father about it yet, Deborah?"

"Only tell about it to me," she answered. "You'll

have to tell me about it a thousand, thousand times more afore ever I can believe such a beautiful thing. But none else. We'll hug it close for a long while. 'Tis loveliest so. I don't feel I could tell anybody yet—save the birds and the butterflies and such, as won't blab it again."

"Ah!" he said, "how we think alike! I feel the very same. 'Tis a thing I won't trust out of our keeping. None shall know it till some poor man comes to you to say the same. Then you'll have to tell him that you'm tokened."

"Tokened—tokened—the loveliness of the word, Ned!"

He held her tightly again and kissed her cheek.

"So 'tis, then—when it happens to yourself—though, somehow, nought much if you hear it about other people."

"A secret—what a secret! But how if it jumps out? You'm so strong that you can hide anything, like a grown man, as you say; but I'm only a weak thing, and 'twill be on my tongue to sing it and my lips to laugh it. And my very eyes will say it, Ned, when I think suddenly upon it."

"You'll soon get used to the idea, Deb. Perhaps, after the first fun of it be gone, you'll feel sorry you was in such haste to take such a poor chap as me."

"You dare say that! No, never, never will I change. You're more like to. I've always loved you—remember that Ned,—always. Didn't I kiss you when you had to go to sea—and me only a dinky maid of fourteen then? But 'twas love of you made me, though maybe I didn't know it myself."

"And I—I didn't know neither; but when you kissed me in the dimpsy that night, it made me hate the sea worse than ever."

"Then I'm sorry I did it."

He held her hand without speaking. Then she surprised him.

"The loveliest things be so cruel short! The sun was up yonder when you axed me, and now it's

sinking. Ax me again, ax me again, Ned, afore 'tis out of sight. Say it all over again! 'Twill not be like the first time; but 'twill be good to hear it again."

He laughed.

"Things said can't come back. I couldn't go over it again, more than you could go back on your promised word."

"But try—just offer for me again—just once!"

"Well, so 'tis. I want you, Deborah, to be my wife come presently, and I ax you now, for mortal fear there'll come another stronger than me, and——"

"'Wife'—'wife'—what a fine word! And so I will then be your wife, and you'll be my husband—my husband, Ned Major. 'Mrs. Deborah Major'—to think of it—such a slip of a thing as me—undersized and good-for-nought but to love you—and then—suddenly—'Mrs. Deborah Major'!"

The rapture and the flame of these great moments silenced them presently. They sat together, close as the rock and the flower, hand in hand, linked heart to heart with shared joys and hopes and longings. Nothing passed between them but intermittent squeeze of fingers. The magic message of an absolute understanding throbbed back and forward with their pulses. Love forgot that they were children. A fine dignity marked their attitude now. They were content to kiss no more or speak no more, but silently follow thoughts in a communion closer than words could weave or eyes signal. Their young spirits were never nearer than then; the shared life of years to come; the shared happiness and sorrow, triumph, and failure, served only as the visible crown and spire of that dual fabric whose foundations were welded now and for ever in this boy-and-girl glory of pure devotion.

He loosed her hand presently and turned and picked a flower.

"Here," he said, "I can't give you no ring, Deb, for I haven't got no money to buy one, if I dared; but

this'll do for the present. Press it in a book, and take it for tokening."

"They'm terrible tender flowers," she said. "Pick another as will last better."

"Here's a bit of clover then."

"And I'll give you one, Ned."

"No, you won't. I want something better for myself—something closer to you—a bit of your own precious self, Deb."

He took out his knife and sawed off a little lock of her hair.

"There," he said. "That'll keep so close to me as I know how to make it. I've got an old locket at home as belonged to my mother. Lydia didn't want it when the things was gone through, so I took it on the quiet and hid it in my treasure-box. There's hair in it—my great-grandmother's, or some such bygone party. But that I'll fling away, and put in this here little dear, darling black curl; and 'twill go next my skin for ever, Deb."

They talked on, and knew not hunger or the passage of the stars. Then darkness thrust itself upon them, and they perceived that, save for themselves, the great cliffs slumbered. The insects were silent, the flowers were closed, the birds had gone to rest.

"They'll fear for you," said Ned. "I'll see you home quick. We ought to have got off this place by light, for 'tis tricky half-way up."

But love held a lantern to her feet; she passed unfearful upward, and only grew timid when he prepared to leave her.

"I hate for you to go," she said. "The time will seem so cruel long. There's rising up a dreadful fear in me that you'll be a grey-headed old man afore I see you again!"

"A fortnight's long, and awful long," he admitted, "but 'tis a fortnight nearer to getting you."

"I'll never be patient enough and brave enough to be worthy of such a wonder, Ned."

"Kiss me once more, if you ban't tired of it," he answered. "God knows, however I can hide this out of sight. 'Tis only a question in my mind which of us be likely to let it out first."

"I won't—trust me for that," she promised.

Then they parted, and within ten minutes life fell harshly on Deborah's dream, and yet a word was said that delighted her and made her forgive the rest.

"I won't have you gadding about like this after dark with young Major, or anybody else," said Mrs. Honeywill. "Here's Ned three parts a man; and we all know what sailors are when they come off the sea; and though you'm small, you'm getting on now—up home sixteen years old; and 'tisn't right; so don't you do it again."

Deborah promised; then she went up to her room and put Ned's clover into her hymn-book at her favourite hymn.

CHAPTER III

Though Ned honestly supposed that his aversion from the sea was closely hidden and that his father had no suspicion thereof, he erred; and now the time had come for Mr. Major to let him know it. Years had passed, and the experiment might be considered conclusive. But John postponed the inevitable truth—so hard to accept from his point of view. At length, however, his sense of justice smote upon him and rendered him uneasy. Ned was just seventeen, and his father knew that a life pursued upon the wrong road is folly. He could not reconcile himself to keeping his son at sea. The battle was hard, but this man, long schooled to yield before the pressure of an active and superstitious conscience, soon concluded with himself and set about planning Ned's future upon more reasonable principles. The boy he did not tell; but he took the problem to one well able to answer it, and visited his friend Nicholas Honeywill at Berry Farm. Sore he was at heart, yet quite affirmed to give his son full liberty. It seemed to him that the last lawful ambition was gone out of his life. He thought of the 'Jack and Lydia' sailing without a Major in her, and the picture struck him into a settled gloom, hard to indicate for those who have not similarly clung to some natural mundane hope and found it fail them. He could not understand, and soon ceased to attempt to do so; but he knew well enough how the matter stood, and very accurately defined the situation to Nicholas Honeywill as they walked upon Berry cliffs together on a Sunday afternoon in early winter time.

"'Tis said in a few words, and as you have had a son who turned from the life he was born to, and looked elsewhere—you'll understand. My Ned be like your Tom—can't settle to what you might say was the calling planned by Providence. But if a lad won't grow into a sailor, despite all efforts made to make him one, then we must agree Providence don't want him at sea, but have cut out his work for him ashore."

"That's all true," admitted Mr. Honeywill, who was an easy man, with more common sense than religion. "Everybody's found it out but you long ago."

"I was slow to do so, for my wish and hope—my last hunger this side of heaven, you might say—was to see Majors carrying on the name. But, so far as one can say at the moment, it isn't to be."

"Of course not; your lad's a born farmer."

"For the moment," repeated John Major, "it looks as if I wasn't to have my dearest will. And I'm going to yield the point without more words. Mind you, I don't give up hope—never. None but God's self can say what's hidden in time, and I may yet live to sail with my own blood, and live to give up the tiller to them of my own loins. The ways of the Lord be past understanding, Nicholas, but not past trusting."

"That's where we differ, Jack," answered the landsman. "If I've got a vartue, 'tis plain speech, and, without offence, I tell you that I never have and never will trust the Lord a yard. And what's more, on the showing of life and the things that happen, He's no right to ask it of us. Nought happens but the unexpected—that's common knowledge, and even got to be a proverb—then why trust the Lord more than anybody else? Why, there's a score of men—yourself included—I'd trust sooner! I've seen too much of His ways—afloat and ashore, Jack. A woman's trustworthy beside Him; the sea's trustworthy beside Him—aye, and

spring weather and the promise of autumn. Let dogs trust—man's a fool to do so."

"I wish you'd hold off saying such things; but you'll know better soon or late, and your eyes will be opened. Too many farmers think as you think, though few would care to say it out as you do."

"Well, the upshot is, I suppose, that you be going to let your boy come ashore for good and all? Quite right, Jack—the more that drop out of your business, the better for them left in it. Trawling without steam be a played-out game; and none knows it better than you."

But Mr. Major contested this assertion with all his might.

"You can tell nothing about it," he answered. "You be far too ready to hear the talk of them that have failed."

"I hear your son-in-law—him that's taught my Tom his business; and whatever Brokenshire may be, not even you can deny that he's a good fisherman."

"No need to name him to me. As for him, take care he don't teach Thomas more than you want the boy to learn. And as for our fishing in general, only let 'em finish the breakwater, and there'll be such a return of prosperity that the young men will be crowding to the boats again."

"Yes—let 'em finish it. Let's see the Government that will do that for you."

"I grant that trawl-fishing be fickle in a manner of speaking," admitted John. "You can't say where you'll meet dearth or hit on plenty. Even the Dogger's trawled barren off and on. I can mind in my youth when hake swarmed inside Penlee Point off Plymouth, and herrings schooled in the Sound as a matter of course. But 'tis all up with Plymouth now, along of great gun-firing and torpedo practice. As for the open sea, 'tis a matter of fashion. Everybody cries out for Mount's Bay just now. Yet Penzance be a terrible far market."

"All very interesting," answered the farmer, "but it don't alter my argument, that the game's played out, and we oughtn't to put our sons in it—onless they chance to be pig-headed fools like my Tom, and will go whether we want 'em to or to not."

"Wait a bit, I'm only just beginning. You're like most other landsmen, and think a fish be just a fish, and that one fish is as good as another; but that's the big mistake you all make. This here's a trawlers' harbour, and a trawlers' and liners' harbour is quite a different thing to a netters' and drifters' harbour. At least it should be so. 'Tis not the netters that catch the valuable fish, remember. The white fish trade is what belongs to us, and the stuff we fetch ashore is worth just half as much again as what the netters and drifters bring."

Mr. Major then grew technical, examined the relative prosperity of Grimsby and Hull, North Shields and Stornoway, Milford and Lowestoft. He argued at great length, and proved to his own satisfaction, if not to Mr. Honeywill's, that Brixham continued to be the first of the demersal fishing ports.

"The harbour's the thing," he wound up; "and only let us have our harbour finished, the rest will follow in its order. Deny us the harbour, and I grant that the fight may end by going against us."

Anon the talk turned to family matters, and John summed up.

"For such as me, Nicholas, 'tis always a blessing to feel that whatever does happen is always better than what I might wish to happen. And so it falls out that now, just on seventeen years old, my boy must leave the sea. He knows his business, and he hates his business. He's got considerable craft to hide it from me, and he tries, in a very manlike way, to be a fisherman; but it won't do no more. He must come ashore, and, in a word, farmer, I ax you to take him. He mustn't ruin his usefulness to give me pleasure."

"A thousand pities you didn't see all this sooner, like everybody else, my dear. However, better now than later. I've always offered for him to come here, and very glad I shall be to take him. He's the stuff to make a farmer, and the softness that was in him I dare say the sea have stamped out. So let him come. 'Twill fit in very suent, because my Tom can take his place along with you."

"I was going to propose it. There's room with me, when Ned goes, and your boy's been with Brokenshire long enough."

"You'll find him all that he ought to be. And I'd rather he was with you than any other man."

"I know he's all he should be—as we've a right to expect from your wife's child, if not yours. And if I can larn him to trust in the Almighty, I shall do so. I warn you of that, Nicholas."

"Why not? Larn him everything in your power," said Mr. Honeywill. "'Tis a great accomplishment to be able to trust, and a useful thing also. We've only got to look at you to see that. So let it be, then. After Easter will make a very good time for all parties. And I'll send off a young, useless man that I've got here for the moment, and have the way clear for Ned."

"Tell none until it happens," concluded John Major. "I'll let my boy hear come presently."

"And I'd give a bushel of oats to see his face when you tell him—and my Deb's also. They'm thick as thieves, and always have been. You mark me, John, that couple will be man and wife afore many years have passed over 'em, if all goes easy! Well, I hope you'll like such a plan a bit better than your daughter's arrangements. She've brought Samuel a fine boy, anyway."

The other was silent, and Nicholas continued. But he spoke with caution, for he trod dangerous ground.

"A grandchild's a great thought. It puts a man in his true position, and reminds him that two

generations have slipped by, and that he belongs more to the past than the future. Life begins to race when you'm past the half-century. You'll forgive an old friend for telling about it; but I suppose now, Jack, you can't bury the hatchet over this youngster and forgive 'em? I know your son-in-law better far than you do, and this I will say for him: he's a good sportsman, brave as a lion, and generous too. He've been very straight and fair to my Tom, and taught him something amazing. Quite above-board, too, in the matter of his night games. He've never risked Tom's good name."

"When you say 'night games,' you say all that's to be said," answered Mr. Major. "I take it in very good part that you should mention the matter, and you do it from nought but kind feeling to me and my daughter. That I know. But never have I gone willingly from my word, Nicholas; and until the man can show a clean record and stand above suspicion, I'll do what I said I'll do and not know him. Don't you think 'tis a light thing to feel the years slip by and I can't kiss my own daughter. Don't think 'tis a light thing to pass Lydia in the street and turn my eyes from her. I've seen her go by in all the glory of this here coming child, and I've longed cruel deep to speak to her and be a father to her; but it shan't never be till that man gives over his bad ways."

"He goes to church, however."

"Not now," corrected Mr. Major. "He *went* to church, I grant you—regular as clockwork—for why? to get round me. But weren't no use going to church of a Sunday night and to Start Bay after dark the same evening. 'Tis the case of the green bay tree; and his prosperity, which can't be denied, is built on dishonesty."

"I wish to God they'd open Start Bay and have done with it," said Mr. Honeywill. "I for one, mind you, be very much on Brokenshire's side in the matter; and 'tisn't as if he was the only man as

fetches his living out of it at great risk. Many another does the same and nothing said."

"If they opened it to-morrow, Brokenshire would have no more use for it," answered John. "Don't think that I haven't sized him home pretty close all these years. He's the stuff that law-hating and law-breaking men be made of. 'Tis a poison that be in the blood, and sometimes it works off with years and cares, and sometimes it never does. I've known old men—smugglers by nature—as will take more trouble to get an unlawful dram or a contraband pipe of tobacco than fifty straight ones would have cost 'em. And this here Brokenshire—'tisn't so much the money, 'tis the risk and what he'd call the sport of the thing that makes him what he is."

"He's growing older. He's a father now. Belike 'twill steady him."

But the fisherman was not sanguine. He regarded the future of the Brokenshire family with very keen discomfort. Life, indeed, and its few remaining issues looked grey to the old man as he returned home presently. His wife was gone out of it—taken from the evil to come as it seemed; his daughter had married a man of whom little good from John Major's point of view could be asserted; his son would sail with him no more.

He fell back upon his recent phrase to the farmer, and repeated it to himself.

"'Tis well to remember always—always—that what happens is better than what we would like to happen. Shall them as be three parts blind by nature question the All-seeing?"

CHAPTER IV

The fishing fleet was home for Easter, and Brixham harbour suffered a great congestion. By ill chance strong winds prevailed from the south-east and the outer anchorage did not serve. Many boats lay at Dartmouth, and the old, vexed subject of the incomplete breakwater filled men's mouths and rose in a grumbling storm wherever half a dozen fishermen were gathered.

The tide was out, and Ned, Gilberd, and Michelmore, in their jack-boots, worked on the hull of the 'Jack and Lydia.' She was shored up high and dry between two sister boats not far from the statue of King William. In closely packed rows the trawlers filled the harbour, and their masts ascended in a brown jungle of bright poles sloping every way.

Painting and repairing occupied two hundred men. Arthur Michelmore and William Gilberd worked hard with pots of white and black paint upon the bulwarks of their vessel; Ned scraped away at her shapely hull, for that was also to be re-painted before she sailed again.

While they worked they talked, and Gilberd told of the prosperity of his younger son and the failure of the elder.

"My plasterer boy can't find a job," he said. "Plastering be down on its luck for the moment; yet you see houses springing up like mushrooms everywhere you look."

"Perhaps 'tis him and not the business," suggested Michelmore. "Why did he leave his last job afore 'twas finished?"

"There's two sides to that," replied William, "and I daresay you've heard but one."

"I heard——" began Arthur. Then he stopped.

"I know what you heard, and 'twas a full-sized lie. A better workman never lived, nor yet a soberer."

"I lay he'll get another good job soon," suggested Ned.

"If not, he'll do well to follow my second son," continued Gilberd, "and go in a shop if he can find one. There's nothing like a shop. You always have a roof over you for one thing; and if you're a sharp man, you get on and save money, and reach a point when you can very likely start yourself. I wish I had a bit of cash. I'd start one of they little shops where you can buy everything—yes, to-morrow I'd start it."

The other laughed at the spectacle of the horny and grimy Gilberd behind a counter. Then came along John Major and called his son to him.

Why he had chosen this morning and this moment to tell Ned of his release, the man could not have explained. He had been sowing seeds in his plot of land, when the smell of the earth and the labour of turning it brought Ned forcibly to his mind. He had left his spade and rake, therefore, donned his coat again, and gone down to the harbour, where his son was working.

"I've got to talk to you," he said. "Come to the end of the pier; and I'll sit on yonder bollard and you can stand and listen."

Mr. Major lit his pipe. No spark of humour belonged to his composition, yet on this occasion of all others, when such a thing might least have been expected, some accident of mood cast his mind into a jovial bent. Such accidents belong to thought. His own long pains before this conclusion had numbed him. He could now find it in his sad and disappointed heart to make a sort of jest. The joke was, however, lost upon his son; because Ned had neither ears nor observation for any light or shade

that might lurk in the father's speech. The terrific fact now uttered was all that he could receive. Indeed, it overwhelmed him, and left him in doubt whether he woke or dreamed.

"List to me," began John. "You're a fisherman now, and you know your business after a boyish fashion; but I'm not satisfied with you. I see younger lads going ahead of you. I don't want to turn you off, Ned, for you're a very good son and always have been; but somehow 'tis borne in upon me of late that you might shine better ashore. I don't want to have you out of the boat, mind—but the time is come for you to decide. You must set to work to get your ticket and pass the examination before long; but what's the use of that if you'd sooner do something else?"

Ned stared, and his heart beat hard.

"I try to do my best, father."

"Who can do more? But can you do your best in my boat? Would you like to sail with somebody else?"

"Father!"

"No, you wouldn't. Then the question is, Can you do your best in any boat? A man's best powers belongs to him as a gift from his Maker, and none have a right to turn him out of that road into another that leads him astray; none have a right to choke him off the thing he's built to do. That I've learned in the night watches. When you say you do your best, I say you don't. You try your best; but you don't do it. For why? Because you ban't built to do your best on the water. Now here it is. The sea have piped to you, Ned, but you haven't danced. And I tell you seriously that 'tis a solemn question in my mind whether you've a right to be on the sea any longer."

The boy felt stifling. He took off his cap and dropped it. Vivid emotion flashed over his face. Mr. Major cast a side glance at him, then recrossed his legs and sucked his pipe.

"Don't think I want to drive you ashore. Don't think I want to go on working without you. But my voyage is three parts made, and the harbour lights will luff up afore many more years be over. Yours is but begun. You've got to think of the port from the time you set your course. In a word, I'd have you seriously consider whether you wouldn't be doing your God's work better on the fields than along of me. Come now—would it be a very terrible wrench if I said you wasn't to sail again after Easter? Would it go very cruel against the grain of your nature, Ned, if I told you as I'd spoken with a friend of mine by the name of Nicholas Honeywill, and that, out of his kindness, he'd promised to find you work at Berry Farm?"

Ned became unnerved. His father realised how much more tremendous was this news than he had guessed.

"There—there," he said. "Don't be a girl about it—and you seventeen! I ought to have told you out of sight of the world. But perhaps 'tis because you don't want to leave me and come ashore, after all? If that's so, you can try once more."

He strove to laugh.

"You'll be in sight of the sea, Ned. The noise of it and the smell come up to the farm. And if you change your mind again—why, you're welcome to your father's boat as none else on earth or water could be welcome. But from what I see it don't look too likely."

The boy swallowed and gurgled, picked up his cap and drew long staggering breaths.

"I won't leave you, father," he said. "I can't do it—and you what you are to me—and Lydia gone from you and everything."

"Not everything, Ned. No, you won't leave me, my lad. It won't be leaving me to do what you're called to do. There's no fault in you. You've done your duty by me, and shan't I do mine by you? Get back to your work now, and after evening we'll go up

to the land, and we'll finish seed sowing to-morrow. To-morrow's Good Friday, and though a many would laugh at such a thing, yet 'tis true that seed sown on that day do prosper amazing. I've proved it over many years by careful note."

"I'll live to make you proud of me, father; and if ever you want me back in the boat, I'll come, and gladly I'll come."

"Shake hands on that then. And if ever you want yourself back in the boat, your billet's open. And—and on Sunday we go up and have a tell with Nicholas."

Mr. Major sat on awhile upon the bollard. Then he rose, ascended to the harbour parapet and entered into conversation with other men.

Meantime Ned had returned to the 'Jack and Lydia' with the world all changed for him. A strange, suffocating medley of emotions made him fight for breath. He scraped away and did not heed the glances cast at him by Gilberd and Michelmore. At last he could hold in no longer, but had to speak, and blurted out his news.

"I be going, William. I'm leaving the boat. I don't sail with her again."

But Mr. Gilberd was not much surprised.

"Well, well, I dare say you'll bear up against it," he said. "You take my advice, Edward, and go in a shop of all sorts. 'Tis the sure way to a fortune. You'll be so poor as a gull if you stop at sea."

"I bet you're for digging and delving, ban't you?" asked Arthur Michelmore. "Some like it better than any other walk of life, and you're of 'em."

"Yes, I am," declared Ned.

"Ah! you'd sooner be steering a sparky cow or a score of pigs than a fishing trawler. We've all got our tastes," added Arthur. "I wonder what'll be done about your clothes? I know a young boy whose mother would offer a fair price for a good few things. They'll be too big; but she'd make 'em ship-shape, and 'twould save her a pound or two."

This practical thought gave Ned pause. It seemed to bring the future closer. He would soon doff his fisher garb for the last time, and the idea silenced him. He was still more bewildered than joyful. Even sorrow mingled with his emotions as he thought upon his father.

"And who will come along of us, I wonder?" asked Arthur.

They speculated upon this point and advanced various incorrect theories.

CHAPTER V

Mr. Titus Peach was a patient and persistent man. Though his nephew had promised to serve him, if possible, in the direction of Mrs. Michelmore, yet Sam did nothing, and much time passed. Then, feeling such continued delay unseemly, Titus visited John Major's sister again and reminded her that they were not growing younger. She admitted it and, ever in extremes, declared the reverse was the case. "Both you and me be wearing cruel badly," she said. This, however, he denied; and then he won from her a promise to give the matter close thought with a view to some conclusion within the year.

Anon Mr. Peach approached his nephew again, and Samuel explained that only a rare press of circumstances had come between him and his promise.

"The boy arrived and put everything else out of my head, and then months slipped by and such a lot happened, and you didn't remind me."

"But I did the sails for nought gratis on that account," said Titus. "And I hold you to your promise, and I'm inclined to think that Lydia could help. We're very good friends—your wife and me—and there was the christening spoon I gave you besides."

Brokenshire declared that nothing should longer keep him from fulfilling his obligations.

"I'll talk to Mrs. Michelmore like a parson," he said, "and show her that 'tis worse than madness to keep such a man as you on the hooks a day longer."

"Do so. I've seen her again of late and she's friendly, but won't come to anything one can hold by. You might say that in your opinion there's a

slight change come over me too. I wouldn't ask you to say it if it wasn't the truth; but there is. I should call it a cloud no bigger than a man's hand. Yet I can't deny 'tis there. Not that I like her less, but I can't help feeling that her state of mind is a thought cool and calculating. She ought to feel a little more for the fiery nature of the male creature. In fact, 'tisn't kind, and 'tisn't affectionate to keep putting it off year after year. At least, so I think; and you might just hint, in the most guarded language you can find, that I've got a fit of impatient manhood on me and be looking round. Don't say it in a way to hurt her. But 'tis true. I begin to feel that a wife isn't the only interesting thing in the world."

"I quite understand," declared Sam, with great confidence; "and the matter falls very pat, because me and Lydia have been planning a great adventure already. She wouldn't do it at first, but now I've got her to carry war into the enemy's country, in a manner of speaking; and 'tis quite settled between us that next time my father-in-law's at sea, me and my wife and the baby will all go and swoop down on Widow Michelmore, and put our arguments before her."

"'Tis a very bold move," declared Titus. "And I'd think twice and again before you risked it."

"We have. 'Twas Lydia's own idea for that matter, and Ned didn't see any cause against. So it's going to be; and then, when she's got over her astonishment, I'll have a slap at the old woman on your account."

Brokenshire kept his promise, and, much to her amazement, Emma Michelmore, upon going to answer a knock at the front door ten days later, found Samuel and Lydia drawn up outside it. The latter carried her baby.

Emma fell back and held up her hands feebly, whereupon the visitors entered with great boldness, and Samuel shut the door behind them.

It was Lydia who explained this conduct.

"I heard from Mrs. Gilberd that you'd taken a lot of kindly interest in my little boy, Aunt Emma, and it seemed to me and Sam only right and proper that you, who are one of the child's nearest relations and always a very kind and good aunt to me—kinder than I deserved, I'm sure—should be the first to see him. Sam doubted; but I said that you had no quarrel with your great-nephew, and that we should be doing actual wrong to keep him away from you. And now that he's old enough to take notice and know people, I felt it was more than time to bring him. And I hope you feel the same, I'm sure."

Lydia kissed her aunt, resolutely laid her sleeping bundle in the old woman's arms, and looked round at the familiar scene.

"And we've come for a bit of a tell and a cup of tea, and no offence, I hope," concluded Samuel.

"You take my breath away," began Mrs. Michelmore. "Can such things happen? This morning I'd have said they couldn't. Yet now they actually have."

"You must blame baby if anybody," declared Lydia, taking off her hat. "In a sort of a way you might say it was the child's thought. We've come out of respect to you, Aunt Emma, and for no other reason at all."

"If you have," she answered, "the point is not what I think, but what your father would think."

"He couldn't think different. I shouldn't come and stand before him, because I must wait his good pleasure, and I'm sure Sam and me are patient enough, and go on being slighted by him in a way that very few would. But you're different. Ned told me ages ago, when I first married, that father had laid down no rules for anybody but himself. And you can't say I wronged you, Aunt Emma—you can't, dear Aunt Emma, say that."

The bundle stirred in Mrs. Michelmore's arms.

"And if I did, that little heavenly angel never did."

Mrs. Michelmore, who had been the mother of

four children and lost them all, looked into the baby's face and then examined him generally.

"He's over-heavy for his age. Is the doctor satisfied? His vaccinations have took, I see," she said.

"Doctor was delighted from the first," declared Lydia.

"What's the name of un?"

"John—after father."

"I settled that," said Brokenshire, with a virtuous and long-suffering air. "'No matter that Mr. Major had treated me so harsh,' I said, 'his firstborn grandson shall be called after him'; and so it is. And, for all I've had to put up with, I'm a fair man, and an hour after the boy was born, I said to Lydia, 'Well, I only hope he'll be as good a man as his grandfather'—didn't I, Lyddy?"

"I wasn't attending much just then; but I've no doubt you did, Samuel," answered she.

Emma Michelmore surveyed the infant cheerlessly. She asked technical questions, and was not satisfied with the answers. The child showed great amiability, however, and this she could not deny. It was happy with her—a fact that Mrs. Michelmore put down to lack of vitality and other distressing causes.

Samuel made himself at home and Lydia laid the cloth for tea. She knew the contents of every drawer and cupboard, and offered to make all necessary preparations for the meal while Samuel retired awhile with Emma to the parlour.

"I've got a very important and private subject to talk on," explained Mr. Brokenshire. "I'm sorry to trouble you, and, if it was on my own account, I should not presume to it; but 'tis for another, and you're an interested party, and so I must ask you, as your nephew-in-law, to listen. My family have always had a very great respect for you, missis. My mother thought a lot of you, I do assure you, and always taught me to do the same."

Thus Sam flattered and chattered and did the best in his power for his uncle.

"You might think 'twas pretty fair cheek on my part to interfere in such a subject," he concluded. "But you know what it is to be married, and so do I. Poor Uncle Titus, however, does not, though much he wants to. And he's not a man of any great pluck at the best of times, though in the first flight for wisdom; and now, to be honest with you, he's got his tail between his legs and feels the fight is going against him."

"I'm a good deal astonished," she said, "that he could have mentioned the matter to you, or any other body."

"'Twas in his desperation that he done it. You can't deny that you gave him great encouragement, ma'am."

"I do deny it," she answered. "I've never given any human creature great encouragement in my life—not in any direction. What is there to be encouraging about? I told him once, and I told him again, the family history; and there's nothing very encouraging about that, I can assure you, young man. Many and many a hopeful creature I've chastened with the story of the Majors and Michelmores—your uncle among the rest. And if you'd like to hear it——?"

"Certainly I should," said Samuel. "Very glad and proud to hear anything you care to tell me."

"I should have thought that your wife would have set it out afore you, same as I did afore your uncle; but be that as 'twill, the story don't get no cheerfuller for the telling—though truth's truth. To begin with there's me. I buried my four almost before you might say I'd settled down into married life. And then my husband died a sudden death by falling off the pier-head through darkness—not drink, as more than one said, and the Lord will remember it against them. Then come Uncle Stooks, who went mad, and so we buried him; and

him not cold in the earth before poor Arthur Bolder, brother of the barber and tokened to sister Sarah, what did he do but fall out of one of they swinging boats at Brixham regatta and break his neck? So we buried him; and nobody ever offered again for Sarah——"

"So you buried her?" said the rash listener.

Emma drew herself up.

"No, Brokenshire, my sister's living as you very well know, or ought to. She's to Dartmouth, and a better, wretcheder woman never did live there or anywhere; and the man that would make fun of what I'm telling would dance on his mother's grave."

"Sorry," said Samuel. "It slipped out—more shame to me."

"Then my sister-in-law died—went through the doctor's fingers, you might say. They couldn't give the disease an honest name anyway; and they couldn't save her, because she'd married into our family. Faded out like a forgotten fire, that woman. And so we stand; and whose turn next? Your uncle, in his silly, hopeful way, pretends that we've come to the end of our ill fortune; but I know better. You wait and watch your baby. And as for Titus Peach, I won't say 'yes' and I won't say 'no' till I see if he's right and if there's any sign of our luck lifting."

"What does Mr. Major think, if I may ask?"

"What he thinks I can't say. He won't utter an opinion."

"Of course he wants for you to stop with him and keep his house. But all the same, I'm sure he wouldn't stand in the way of your happiness. He's a very good friend to Mr. Peach."

A moment later Lydia called them to tea. She whispered to Sam, and he put his hand in his pocket.

"If I didn't forget all about it," he said. "'Tis a gift for you from my uncle. You know what a

humble sort he is—hadn't the courage to give it to you when last he saw you, though he'd got it on him all the time."

Samuel handed Mrs. Michelmore a little packet, and she opened it immediately.

A fat red book appeared: 'Culpepper's Herbal.' She turned over the pages.

"So he's got it," she said. "He was full of it a bit ago. 'Tis thought a lot of in some places, so he told me, and he's won good from some of the recipes, I believe."

"He's put your name in it, too, and said I was to hope you'd give him the pleasure of accepting it, though he trusted you'd never need to use it."

The widow turned to the front leaf of her grotesque gift, and read: '*To Mrs. Emma Michelmore with the respectful regards of Titus Peach.*'

"I'll accept of it," she said. "'Tis a book I've often wanted to get hold on. You can tell him it's got safely to my hand, and I'm obliged to him."

Lydia ventured upon a suggestion.

"I suppose you wouldn't write uncle a letter of thanks, Aunt Emma? He was saying last time he came to see us that he'd never had a sight of your penmanship, and I told him what a beautiful and out-of-the-common hand you wrote. I happen to know that he took a great deal of trouble to get that little book from a friend of his up in Derbyshire, where everybody believes in herbs; and I'm sure he'd be very proud to think you could spare the time to send him a letter."

"You know, or you ought to know, how much time I've got to spare," answered her aunt. "But, all the same, I'll do as you say, and drop the man a line after I've read a bit of the book."

Tea was taken, and under the influence of it Mrs. Michelmore shed a few softening tears.

Sam took his leave, and, after he had gone, Emma fixed her dewy eyes upon the baby and admitted that his appetite was good. She even hoped that

his maternal fortunes might be balanced by a better history on the father's side.

"Not that you've a right to expect so, Lydia, for the Brokenshires are a drowning family."

Her niece, however, disputed this assertion, and presently the elder was forced to admit that she had confused them with some other people.

"With the exception of Sam's father and uncle, no Brokenshire was ever drowned in living memory," declared the fisherman's wife.

"So much the more likely the next generation will be," retorted her aunt. "And don't think to keep that child off the sea if he's spared to grow old enough to go on it. For you never will."

Lydia washed up, strove to cheer Mrs. Michelmore, spoke a kindly word for Mr. Peach, with whom she was on excellent terms, and then put in a plea for herself.

"If you only could," she said—"if you only could speak a few words for Sam and me to father. 'Tis such cruel work, and the years slipping away, and him growing older, and Ned gone from him now."

"Cruel work, as you say, and 'tis your husband as is the cruel party. Father don't go from his word."

"But Sam's as straight as any living man can be now. Since the baby was born he's solemnly promised—and he went to the christening, and he'd go back again to church as regular as possible if he thought that any good would come of it."

"It's reached to your father's ears that you've give up going too."

"Well, I pray you to say a word, and ask him to let the past be forgotten. See how he takes it when you tell him about this visit, and if he's kind over it; and if he's interested in hearing about the baby, you might go a step further."

"He may be very angry, however. I won't promise how he'll take it."

"A lot depends on your cleverness," answered Lydia, with much diplomacy. "You know what a

power you are over him—naturally. Indeed, when I think of what father would be without you—in fact, I can't think of it; and so, though I like Mr Peach very much and he's a good uncle to me—yet I can't see you gone from here. But do be bright when father comes home; do, dear Aunt Emma, tell him about this visit as if you'd liked it. For I'm sure you did like it; and I'm sure you want us to come again, now we've broken the ice; and I'm sure you can't say a word to dear father about the baby that won't please him. And you might tell him that it knows his photograph already. Which is perfectly true."

"I don't say I'm sorry you came," answered the other; "but you mustn't expect me to visit you in return, because when John holds off, I hold off."

"Then get him to come—if only for the child's sake."

"I'll promise nothing at all. A lot will depend on the state of mind he's in when he comes back."

Lydia kissed her aunt and was kissed in return. Then she departed, and her heart upon the whole felt sanguine. She knew that not upon her father's mood, but Mrs. Michelmore's, must depend the result of this visit. John Major was always the same; his sister would colour her story according to her emotions at the time of telling it. And so she did; but being upon the whole in a state of mental amiability after perusal of the extraordinary nonsense in Culpepper, Mrs. Michelmore told her story rather cheerfully and with close attention to facts. She did not excuse Samuel or Lydia for calling, but neither did she condemn them; and she left her brother to judge of the incident without any attempt to influence him.

Mr. Major, home from a voyage of a month's duration, heard all without comment; then he expressed only surprise. His sole questions related to the child.

"'Twas christened the day you sailed," she said. "His name is John—just plain 'John' and nothing

else. A very fine child—I can't deny it—with his father's blue eyes."

The grandfather nodded and preserved a long silence. Indeed, he did not break it again that night, and, when his sister went to bed, he remained deep in thought and took no notice, though she bade him 'Good-night.' Some time after she had retired, his thoughts then running on Samuel Brokenshire, he ascended to her room, knocked at her door, opened it and asked a question.

"Sorry to trouble you, but did Brokenshire say anything about Tom Honeywill leaving him and coming to me?"

Mrs. Michelmore was not asleep.

"Yes, he did; he specially mentioned it. He said that he was sorry to lose Thomas; but that he'd teached him all he could, and it was lucky for him that he should go to the one man in the fleet that could teach him more—meaning you. No doubt 'twas his cunning to get round you that made him say it; but them were his words."

The fisherman thanked her and went down to smoke his last pipe. Many of late had declared better things concerning Brokenshire, and before he slept Lydia's father almost determined with himself to believe them.

"My grandson, John—my grandson, John," whispered the old man to himself. He went to sleep upon the thought; for in his heart, with faith still harboured hope—faith's twin.

CHAPTER VI

Mr. Major's mind moved very slowly, and it was some months before the strong desires within him led to action. His lonely spirit cried out for the companionship of his children, now both taken from him. He did not repine or regret the ordinary course of events, but he asked himself often whether it was necessary that he should continue to be so entirely cut off from Lydia; and he decided that it was not longer necessary. Much stress of mind and many prayers aided the decision, and, stronger far than argument or appeal, was the under-tow of his heart, pulling him, unknown to himself—dragging the old man where his new-come grandson might be found. As for Ned, he saw his father every Sunday when Mr. Major was at home upon that day, and Ned too, played his part in breaking down the barrier between his sister and her parent. All conspired in the same direction; all did what lay within their power to bring father and daughter together again; but perhaps if the work of each had been examined on its merit, and the weight of each determined as a separate factor in the aggregate force that decided the fisherman, certain assertions sprung on shipboard by William Gilberd might have been found of first importance. Arguments, indeed, they were not. William did no more than state facts that had come to his wife's knowledge; and startling though his pronouncements were, they looked so likely to be true that his listener felt a call for instant activity. And Mr. Major's last conscientious doubt was swept away at the same time; for in this nightly conversation, held between John, in the port bunk of the trawler, and William, on his back in the star-

bard bunk, other matters touching the husband of Lydia Brokenshire also arose, and Gilberd strained a large point on the side of charity in connection with them.

Both men would have to rise for the morning watch, and now, awake, they waited their hour and talked together while the boat with her trawl down fought steadily through a lumpy sea under a sky of stars.

"'Tis a curious thing," said William, "why fathers, and still more mothers, have a sneaking fondness for their boys over their girls. Of course we all cry out very loud 'tisn't so, and that we care for 'em all the same; but we don't. And since there's a reason for everything, I'd like to know the reason for that."

Mr. Major reflected.

"In the first place what you say is true," he admitted. "Perhaps it didn't ought to be so; but none can deny it falls out like that most times. And I'll tell you for why, William. 'Tis a form of vanity in us; because, you see, the boys come, they grow up, carry on our own race; but the girls—they only carry on some other man's. That's why we hanker for boys, so that we may be carried on by 'em. And yet for my part, being used to disappointments in many a different line, I've turned of late with a sort of hungering to my daughter's boy, though he's not a Major."

Gilberd pondered these remarks. He had not raised the subject with any purpose to become personal, but since his skipper now related his own attitude in the direction of the Brokenshire baby, William followed that theme.

"And what more natural?" he asked. "That's surely what anybody might expect from a grandfather, I should think. The child's half Major, whether or no, and so like as not he will be all Major, for you never can tell whether the father or the mother will reign in the young creature. He'll

go for a sailor, if not a fisherman—that be a sure truth."

"Why do you say so?"

"First, there's his havage o' both sides; and then there's hisself. My wife sees a bit of your daughter, I must tell you. Mrs. Brokenshire's friendly and kind to all, and though, along of her education and intellects, she's above most fishermen's wives, she gives herself no airs on that account. And the boy's a dinky boy a'ready, and loves a bit of a toy-boat his father gave him, and won't let it out of his sight, so I hear. Goes to sleep sucking of it and won't take his bath without it."

"A fine boy, so my sister says."

"A masterpiece of a young boy by all accounts."

"To a trustful and hopeful pattern of man like me," said Mr. Major, "a generation don't really make so much difference as you might think. And for the life of me, since my own boy have decided for the shore, I can't help turning my mind to this here child."

"What more natural? But of course 'tis all moonshine so long as you hold to what's unnatural, and keep away from your own flesh and blood like you do. Pardon my free speech."

"Moonshine is a hard word," declared Mr. Major; "a very hard word to bring up between a grandfather and his grandson."

"Not at all, and with all respect. How must the father of the child feel——? But there, 'tis no business of mine, and you'll tell me so if I say much more."

Mr. Gilberd rose and began to draw on his boot-socks.

"Speak your mind," answered John. "You can't say that I've ever been vexed at hearing a word in reason from you, William—far from it. And, touching Brokenshire, I'm only too ready to hear good things—God A'mighty knows that. I turn a deaf ear to company now when his name comes up.

Yes, I turn away rather than hear what I don't want to hear. If any understanding man could say to me that Samuel is mending, that Samuel is going straight, and that he's given over his dishonest ways and dishonest opinions—if anybody could tell me that, I should be very thankful."

"Well," answered the other, "and what if they could? And how d'you know they couldn't? You say yourself that you stop your ears or flee if the man's name be named. Perhaps if you oped your ears and bided, you might hear what would please you. I don't flee afore his name, and I can tell you that since Sam's come to be a father, he's growed a very respectable and self-respecting person. He takes himself a lot more serious than he did. He's got his pride, too; and, come to think of it, I don't know that he's much better pleased with you than you are with him. He says you've held off so long that no doubt you'll hold off for ever, and he must find friends for his family and himself elsewhere."

Mr. Major showed uneasiness.

"You tell me he's bettered his ways?"

"Without a doubt," declared Gilberd.

"I'm sore tempted—sore tempted to——"

"As to that, 'tis nobody's business but your own. Only this I will say, because my wife said it to me, and she can see farther through a brick wall than I can, or any other man, for that matter. She said, meaning you, 'Best he looks sharp, anyway, or else the child will slip through his fingers.'"

"What did she mean by that?" inquired Mr. Major.

He had also risen, and was making ready to go on deck. A star or two seemed to fly backward and forward across the aperture of the companion ladder as the 'Jack and Lydia' rolled.

"She means," explained William, "nothing against the child's health, for a finer child don't breathe; but she means that if there's no gran'father, there's still a very useful gran'uncle; and that uncle's name is Titus Peach, the sail tanner. You wouldn't guess he

could care much for a newborn infant, or that such a thing could care for him; but my wife tells me that Titus and your darter's young one be thick as thieves a'ready. And their little hearts ban't big enough to make very many friends at that tender age. And if the child once gets set on thicky tanner, he won't have no use for you."

"My bowels yearn upon him, and I won't deny it," said Mr. Major. "And if you can in solemn honesty assure me that Brokenshire's reported all right and above suspicion by those that know, then what's to stop me from going to 'em? And if Titus Peach, good man though he is, thinks to come between me and my grandson John, he's very greatly mistaken—very greatly."

Gilberd was bending over his boots, and he winked to himself before this statement.

"Let your mind be at peace," he answered. "'Tis the last thing that any sensible man would do to thrust between such as you and your own flesh and blood. What better companion for the little boy than you? I'm sure neither his mother nor father nor Peach nor anybody would wish him a finer friend."

"You see," said the skipper, "when you are up home sixty odd, the time slips by very quick, and in ten years or so from now, if he's an on-coming sort of boy, he'll be ready for sea. And what more natural than that his own grandfather——"

"Nothing in the world," declared William, "nothing in the world more natural than that."

"If 'tis God's will."

"There's another thing," added the younger man. "And, since you opened the subject, you may as well hear my wife's opinion once more. Here's words that your daughter said to her—not in anger, mind you, but in sorrer; and I've had it in my mind to report 'em afore; but then I didn't, doubting whether I'd the right to do so. Mrs. Brokenshire, speaking of that same Peach, said that he was a kindly and a

good and a simple man, and very fond of her, and that, if she couldn't be of any use to her father, she might be some to her husband's uncle."

"Things be clearly coming to a climax," said Mr. Major, "and 'tis no good denying it."

"Of course a husband's uncle is a very cold and distant form of relation compared with your own parent," admitted William; "but the heart of a fine girl like your daughter is no doubt big enough for her husband's uncles and aunts; and nature's nature, and it will out; so the long and short is that if you hold off much more, she'll find an outlet in Sam's relations, and you'll lose both her and her child as well. God forbid that I should say these things to fright you into acting against your conscience; but if, on top of it all, 'tis solemn truth that Sam Brokenshire have turned over a new leaf, then, as a plain man, I can't see what's keeping you back from them an hour longer."

"Things be clearly coming to a climax," repeated Mr. Major. "In fact, 'twouldn't be straining the truth to say they've come to a climax."

And at that identical instant, by a coincidence, another climax was reached, and a serious misfortune overtook the 'Jack and Lydia.'

Suddenly her pace changed. From the steady grind of towing she leapt forward like a greyhound off the leash and heeled to the wind, while the cabin lamp swung and the sound of water hurtling over deck came to their ears.

"Good powers!" cried Gilberd, "we've parted!"

They hastened on deck, to find his words true.

Michelmore was bringing the boat round in a rough sea: the boy fought with the foresail forward; the trawl warp had broken and the trawl and gear were gone. They had been almost new, and represented a sum of seventy pounds.

None spoke, for there was nothing to be said. A misfortune which soon or late meets every trawler had overtaken them.

"Two in three years, and this not six months old!" cried Michelmore.

The day had just broken, and easterly a serrated ridge of waves ran jagged against a thin lattice of purple cloud that hid grey dawn. Aloft all was clear and the morning star shone brilliantly.

"'Bout ship and home," said Mr. Major. "The Lord gives and the Lord takes away."

"I wish he'd took away the old one, all the same," growled Gilberd, but not loud enough for the skipper to hear him.

John Major strove to note their bearings in the crepuscular gloom. Far away to the north came a glimmer as of lightning under the horizon. It was the pharos of the Start, and they laid their course for it.

CHAPTER VII

On the day of Brixham regetta the haven kept holiday, and none reaped more benefit from this fact than Mr. Thomas Munday of the 'Sailor's Knot.' Old friends and customers patronised him throughout the day, and many visitors also swelled his gains and admired the attractions of his museum. During an interval of the afternoon, when the big craft were racing and the minor contests of rowing and swimming had not begun, a company of familiars assembled in the public bar of the inn. Mr. Tribble, the noisy fish salesman, who smote the table with his fist, was there, and Mr. Memery, another fish salesman, kept him company; Brokenshire and his crew spoke with Dick Varwell, who had got a new pair of trousers and was making many jests at his own expense. Titus Peach sat apart with the fanatic, Larkin, and discussed ethical questions. They seemed largely out of place in the reek and din of 'The Sailor's Knot,' but fishermen are fond of religious argument, and few can listen to a debate upon morals without presently uttering their own opinion.

Varwell was talking to Brokenshire about his brother-in-law, Ned Major.

"I've always had a high opinion of the young shaver, and I'm very glad he's settled to the shore. Too many round pegs in square holes as it is. The world's full of 'em; that's why it wobbles so. Look at me. I don't belong to this world at all really, any more than this pair of tweed bags belonged to my legs yesterday. I'm a round peg in a square hole, if ever there was one—far, far ahead of my time—like all great men. But young Ned Major is built for the land, and when I was up that way, taking the air

on the cliff, I met him in the corn and gave him some good advice."

"And what did you get for it?" asked Billy Trust, of the 'Night Hawk.' "'Tisn't much you'd do for nought."

"You're wrong there: for my opinions I've never been known to charge. The worth of advice depends on them that take it. But, with my vegetarian views, I'm glad to have Ned up on Berry Head, because now, if I chance to want a fresh turnip from the earth, or a handful of kerning corn, I can help myself. 'Tis little enough to ask from my fellow man, yet some have denied it, as you know. I've gone to prison before to-day for eating a swede—that's grand old England!"

"You wasn't sent to quod for eating a swede," declared Mr. Munday, from behind the bar. "You was sent for stealing a swede."

"And what if nature makes my belly hungry and man keeps my pocket empty at the same time? Here am I, an immortal soul on one side of a hedge, and here's the fruits of the earth on t'other. There's nobody in sight to explain my views to, and Nature says, 'Eat and go on your way and be useful. You owe it to the human race to act a man's part and fit yourself for the battle of life.' If 'twas a sinner's act to take one small swede, so that I might support my system till I got to the next licensed house, then let it be so. But 'twould have been a fool's act to have refused Nature's offer. And, be it as 'twill, I suppose every sane man would rather be a sinner than a fool."

"That's a nice question," said Mr. Memery, who was metaphysical when he had leisure. "'Twould stand a lot of argument for and against. Which would you rather be reckoned, James Tribble?"

"I'd rather be reckoned what I am—neither one nor t'other," replied the big man.

"That's no answer. Present company excepted, of course—but, for argument's sake, which would you choose for to be?"

"I'd be a fool," declared Thomas Munday; "because heaven looks after them, whereas t'others are the devil's job."

"A very good answer," admitted Mr. Memery. "Who'll better it?"

"It may be a very good answer, but it isn't true," observed Mr. Peach.

One or two men laughed.

"Be you on the side of the knaves then, Titus?" asked Dick Varwell.

"I hope not—in fact, you all very well know I'm not," answered the sail tanner. "But 'twas on this very subject me and Larkin here were speaking. He says that Jehovah's active as ever He was, only not so much in men's eyes—shy like, and not showing Hisself so free in bush or mount as of old. And I say that God don't interfere with us nothing near so often as He did in the days of the Book."

"Right you are, Titus!" cried Tumbledown Dick. "I never guessed you'd got the wit to mark that; and yet how can any man-jack of you but see it, if he knows his Bible? Every jolter's head that learned to read must know it is so. The Almighty always took good care to have the last word with they Jews and Gentiles. He hit 'em, waking and sleeping; He kept 'em stewing in their own juice from the day they was born till the day they died; and a natural death was about the last thing the poor toads could expect or hope for. Life was a nightmare for 'em, and the knaves didn't get any show at all by all accounts in them days; but now they're up on top every time with the oysters and champagne, whereas the fools be only their footstools, to be kicked out of the road when not wanted."

"There's the next world, however—you seem to forget that," said Larkin.

"Is there?" asked Dick. "You say so, but a good many people quite as clever as you, and a good few even cleverer, say there isn't the next world. And I'm one of them."

"So much the nastier surprise you'll have when you get to it," retorted Larkin. "Who's going to read the riddle of this world away from the light of heaven and hell? What's this world but an unfinished thing without a head or a tail? But I tell you that 'twill have both afore 'tis burnt up; and the head of it be in heaven and the tail of it be in hell. And that's justice. And if even such worms as us can see that heaven and hell be part of the plan for common fairness, then how much more can God A'mighty see it?"

"Justice be the thing, and I ask for no more," declared Mr. Tribble, banging the table.

"'Tis what we all pretend we want, but what we none of us would have for the world," answered Dick. "Show me the man who's just come from getting stark justice, and I'll show you somebody that's raw inside and out—whosoever he is. Justice be the last thing a sensible man would cry for, if he could see what it looked like and feel what it felt like first."

"Such as you have reason to say that, no doubt," answered Tribble; "because, if you got justice, they'd put you away once for all as a disgrace to civilisation and a blot on the earth in general; but you stand for yourself and not for anybody else."

"No man ought to be afraid of justice—not if he's a good working Christian," shouted Larkin. "Tribble's right there; and that's why true Christian men are content and go their way and wait their turn. Because they know that time is nothing beside of eternity, and that, afore eternity begins, naked justice will be done on every human creature."

"And don't you hope you'll be there to see?" asked Brokenshire.

"Yes, that he does," answered Dick. "Larkin and Tribble would like to sit one on each side of the Seat of Judgment and watch their friends come up, and shake their heads when the balance was on the wrong side of the books. I can see 'em shrugging their shoulders and smacking their lips. 'Ah! there

goes Tumbledown Dick to his hot corner! And there's Brokenshire's frying-pan making ready. Dear, dear! But a fine thing justice.' There'll be no dismissing with a caution on the Last Day; there'll be no letting off with a fine. Mercy be a man-made article. The God of Jimmy Tribble and Larkin here haven't got no use for that. And if He tried it on, they'd be the first to pull His holy sleeve—one each side—and remind Him that justice was justice and mustn't be tampered with."

Here Mr. Munday intervened.

"No more evil speaking and slandering, or out you go, Dick," he said.

"'Tis these men are slanderers, not me," answered the tramp. "I'm only showing 'em how they look and how their dirty little thoughts look in decent eyes. Justice, indeed! Don't let any man as values his skin or his peace of mind, call out for that! The world at large ban't ripe for it, and I swear Brixham ban't."

They wrangled on. Then a gun fired in the harbour and some departed to follow the sport, but others remained to talk and drink.

Mr. Larkin resented Tumbledown Dick's scornful speeches, and they were still exchanging fierce arguments when there entered an unusual visitor in the shape of John Major.

"You must excuse me, Thomas," he said; "but you know I'm teetotal. I've looked in because I want to speak to Memery here. But I can take a bottle of ginger beer for the good of the house, if you please."

"You'm very welcome, drink or no drink," answered the publican.

Then Mr. Major went and sat by the fish salesman. Their talk was personal, and only related to a beam and irons for the new trawl of the 'Jack and Lydia.'

Suddenly, Brokenshire, who had by evil chance stayed longer in the public-house than was wise, decided that here opened a good opportunity to

approach his father-in-law before an impartial throng. His uncle, seeing him rise and walk towards Mr. Major, endeavoured to stop him, but Sam shook off Mr. Peach and went away. Therefore Titus, who of all things most dreaded a quarrel, crept out that he might not be criminated.

No worse moment could have been chosen by Samuel for his challenge. Only the accident of the lost trawl had prevented John Major from completing a reconciliation at the end of his recent voyage, but he had delayed owing to press of work occasioned by the accident; and now that happened which postponed any immediate hope of peace.

"Morning, Mr. Major," began Samuel. "Sorry to hear about the trawl. I lay Michelmore got off the marks. Some men can't see in the dark."

"That's never been brought against you, however," said Mr. Tribble, and both Dick and Brokenshire laughed at the jest.

John Major seemed in doubt whether to answer. At another time and in another place he might have yielded. In his heart, indeed, he had already yielded and had planned to visit his daughter's home within the week. But this was neither the place nor the moment for that complete return to friendship which he proposed.

Brokenshire's attitude appeared aggressive; his sympathy was not real and was not intended to sound real. The criticism of Arthur Michelmore contained offence. Moreover, Samuel obviously laboured under too much beer.

On this count his father-in-law was minded to ignore him, but the younger man would not be ignored.

"'Twas all in the night's work and had to be," John Major answered.

"Well, so long as you're pleased, there's no need for other folk to be sorry. And, since we're here in company, perhaps you'll let me speak further and ax you, if I may dare to lift my voice afore you, why you treat me and your daughter like dirt under

your feet. I've a right to know, and you can't deny me the right. Patient ban't the word for what I've been; but 'tis time your stiff will bent a bit, and I'll tell you for why. I don't want your friendship, God knows, and more don't your daughter. You're no father to her and never will be, and others can take your place and be proud to have what you don't want. But outward civility and respect, we that are civil and respectful ourselves have a right to ask. And there's another generation rising up; and what's my child done that, when he's old enough to toddle down the quay, his own grandfather won't look at him? We'm as good as you and a sight more Christian-minded, for all your psalm singing and stuff about God A'mighty. We'm as good as you, and as prosperous, and as honest, and as well thought upon. And I say 'tis a scandal you hold off, and these here men will bear me out. If I've been crooked, ban't you taught to forgive crookedness? If I've been young, ban't you taught to forgive youth? I've married your daughter without your leave, and that's the sum total of my crime; and if you can't forgive it and forget it, then you're no true Christian man for all you think you are."

Samuel swayed on his legs during this attack, and sat down abruptly in Tumbledown Dick's lap at the finish. This accident rather spoiled the effect, and some men laughed; but Mr. Major did not laugh. He was impressed with Brokenshire's volubility, and perceived that beer had loosened his tongue.

"'Tis a pity you spoke thus to me to-day, Samuel," he answered quietly. "How great a pity you may come to know later. I've nothing to say to you at present, for 'tis my rule not to waste words on a man in drink. You may bluster as you will, but your own self is your answer. I don't know what I shall do now; what I was going to do don't much matter neither. I can only say again that, for all our sakes, 'tis a very unfortunate thing we met to-day."

He ceased and left the bar a moment later.

Thereupon arguments of a fierce and fiery description broke out among the men; but most took Brokenshire's side and held that he and his wife were much wronged by Mr. Major's attitude. Larkin, Mr. Munday, and Mr. Memery, however, found it not in them to cast blame on Mr. Major.

The problem presently reduced itself to a question whether Samuel might be considered drunk or sober, and Varwell instituted a variety of delicate tests with which he was familiar; but Brokenshire failed to pass even the least exacting ordeal, and, amid noise and laughter, Dick pronounced his friend to be intoxicated.

"'Tis no good denying it," he said; "you're in a case betwixt market-merry and talkative drunk, Sam. Only an early stage, but a very unfortunate one to reach just when that cast-iron, saintly creature came along. Now I guess you'll have to wait a few more years afore he'll trust you, and no doubt a condition of forgiveness will be the pledge."

At this moment another familiar figure appeared in shape of Mr. Bolder, the barber.

"I'm going, boys," he said, "and I'm sorry to go; but the business in Torquay's cheap at the money, and my wife won't stop in the Coffin House another winter."

"'Tis a great come down," declared Dick. "Now, instead of shaving the chins of the honest sons of toil, Frederick, you'll scent the hair of the upper classes, and lie, and tell 'em they ban't getting thin on top, when right well you know that they are. I couldn't trust myself with a razor at the throat of the classes—patriot that I am."

"Why for d'you want to leave us, Frederick?" asked Mr. Munday. "You're doing well, and everybody knows it."

"I don't want to go," declared Mr. Bolder. "I'm Brixham born, and should be very well content to stop among you, and very likely go on the County Council in course of time; and I never did think to

leave. But when a man's married, he can't live to himself alone—not if he is a man. In a word, the wife is sick to death of Brixham, and, whether or no, the Coffin House she will not live in after Michaelmas."

"Silly superstition," declared Dick; "and you, as a rational creature, ought to knock it out of her, Frederick."

"You, as a bachelor, may think so," answered the barber. "I've never yet met the husband as can knock superstition out of his wife; and more have you—that I will swear. Besides, there's a sort of a reason in what she says. Our child—very complete and perfect in everything though she is—have certainly a sort of a something you might easily mistake for a picture of a coffin-lid on her left shoulder. One and all can come and see it, if they doubt. There 'tis; and what the wife says is this: Where will the next be marked? And when that woman don't get an answer, she very quickly pushes argument to extremes. There's another coming, I may say in confidence, and in the wife's opinion 'twill have a coffin pattern from head to heel. She sees it staring out of her dreams; and I'm short of sleep in consequence."

"Mark your childer with the sign of the Cross," snapped out Larkin, "and no other mark matters."

He was a propagandist without self-consciousness or tact. But Mr. Bolder could not be considered a religious-minded man, and he put the interruption aside impatiently.

"I say 'tis all arrant nonsense, and I have no doubt whatever that our next will be white as lather; but that's no use against the wife's dreams. I've got to bend, and, in a word, we're off."

"She ought to trust more in her God," asserted Mr. Larkin, and Mr. Tribble agreed with him.

"I hate to hear of such things in our midst," said the latter. "A woman in the family-way should look above, and not fret herself because her dwelling-

house happens to be in the shape of a man's last long house underground. 'Tis to challenge God and vex Him."

"You know nothing about it, Jimmy," struck in Dick, who always argued against Mr. Tribble. "The barber's missus is quite right, and there's no call to drag in God at all. 'Tis a matter of science, and if breeding women get a bee in their bonnets, a lot of harm may come out of it. We owe it to the unborn to give 'em every chance, and not handicap 'em by worrying their poor mothers afore they are hatched. The lasting surprise is that women with child keep their nerve so well as they do. The pluck they show is one of the wonders of the world."

"They show it, because they mostly know where to trust," answered Larkin. "The Lord's on their side, and they do well to be trustful."

"So you say. But I say different. 'Tis a toss up with the strongest and best of 'em, and cruel often are they left in the lurch, as we all know. Nature's nature, and nature runs off the rails in childbirth very easy indeed; and God don't interfere, because He can't. He's started the machine, and the machine have to go its appointed way, for the machine be a lot stronger than its Maker, just as a runaway steam-roller be stronger than the man that started it."

"In a wiser and more religious world than ours, you'd be burnt to death for that," said Mr. Tribble. "But nowadays there's not enough believers left to get the whip-hand of you atheists, and so we be forced to leave you to your outraged Maker. But though you dare to deny that God's all-powerful, we know where we stand and what's the worth of your argument."

"That nobody can deny," declared Mr. Munday. "And now I'll ask you to change the subject and hand me them empty glasses."

"I do deny it," answered Dick. "God can't do everything, and never pretended He could. 'Tis only silly men, like Tribble, that think He can.

Here's my pint-pot, Thomas—empty as you say. Well, let your God put a quart in it, and I'll call back everything as ever I spoke against Him, and go to church, and live there. There's my score on the slate, I see—thirteen, is it? Well, let your God add it up and make it twelve, and I'll join the Rechabites."

"Whether or no," concluded Mr. Bolder, "we're going, and the Coffin House will be in market after Michaelmas."

"So like as not I'll take it."

"You, Tumbledown Dick?" asked Billy Trust, of the 'Night Hawk.' "And what's the use of a shop to such as you?"

"For a meeting-house," declared Mr. Varwell, as he reached back his full pot. "I'm tired of talking sense in this bar. 'Twould be a fine thing to start in my own pulpit—eh? And take up a collection afterwards."

"'Tis you would be took up, not a collection," foretold Mr. Trust.

CHAPTER VIII

Life, that had dragged at sea for Ned Major, began to race ashore. His days were full and joyous. The future looked radiant; and, though he was at the age when humanity demands most from the days to come and still trusts them, yet even sanguine and happy Ned could sometimes find it in his heart to wonder whether more than his share of good fortune had not already fallen to him.

The labour he delighted in was not labour. Weary and rejoicing he came to the end of each day; hungry to be on the land, he woke and went forth again. Mr. Honeywill declared that such ardour and enthusiasm could not last. When Ned set to work to read agriculture by night, after he had practised it all day; when, more than once, he actually fell asleep over his master's 'Encyclopædia of Farming,' Nicholas Honeywill announced that the thing was absurd, and warned Ned that there would presently come a revulsion and an anti-climax.

"Go easy," he said. "You can't larn all there is to larn 'twixt now and Christmas. I won't have you taking it to heart in this way, because if you do, there'll be a rebound, and presently you'll hate the earth under your feet and cry out for the sea again."

Ned laughed at the idea and redoubled his efforts. He had more in his life than the farmer guessed, and when autumn came and the corn was reaped, when the hunter's moon rode golden aloft and the roots were drawn from the earth, Ned did not work in loneliness. For the blue sun-bonnet of Deborah might generally be seen like a belated flower not far from her lover's point of toil. They were much

together, and the girl's father felt contented and indifferent; but her mother began to grow uneasy.

Mrs. Honeywill belonged to the ordinary type of mother whose eyes are blinded by the wonderful spectacle of their offspring. Did they rest upon another woman's boy or girl, they saw clearly, but in the matter of Tom and Deborah she had ever perceived latent possibilities hidden from other observers. Thus it came about that when Tom went to sea, his mother suffered a very poignant disappointment; and when she began to suspect an attachment between her daughter and John Major's boy, she endured a new and even greater uneasiness. The mother held that Deborah might reasonably look higher than Ned. Against him, indeed, she had no objection to offer; but after all, he was only a fisherman's son and a paid labourer at Berry. His good qualities and general worthiness she did not deny; yet many young men not possible to consider in connection with Deborah were as good and as worthy. She saw a growing danger, guessed Deborah's secret, and decided that her husband must be told. Before the event, however, another happened, and it was Ned himself and not Mrs. Honeywill who confessed to the farmer that he wanted to pay court to Deborah.

The time flew, and much that Ned had hoped would be brought about by time did not happen. He saw his father on Sundays as a rule, and from him learned how that he was going to visit Lydia and the baby, but had been prevented by an unhappy accident.

"I'd made up my mind and fixed the very day," explained John. "Then, by ill chance, I fell upon Samuel Brokenshire drunk at 'The Sailor's Knot.' And so it all went to the ground, and still I bide and wait in patience. I'm sorry to the heart for my child, and I'm sorry for myself; but the fault isn't with me."

"I thought Sam was as good as gold now," declared his son. "I'm sure he's straight enough, father. Everybody will tell you the same now. 'Twould have

been a very cruel disappointment for Lydia, if she'd known the good in store."

"He's put it off six months by his own act," declared Mr. Major. "When I saw him bosky-eyed and heard him talk to me without respect or proper tone of speech, I resolved to change my mind. If they want me, they must win me; and they know how 'tis to be done. And this you can tell Lydia too: that 'tis a very great grief and regret to me to keep away. I'm a lonely old man according to the will of Providence, and I don't repine at it; but if she and her husband will to make me easier, then they know how they can bring it about. When certain people can tell me they haven't seen Brokenshire so much as fresh for six months, to Overgang I go; but not sooner."

Ned promised to convey these conditions, and took it upon him to declare they would be fulfilled. And then he touched his own affairs and told his father what he had done and what he hoped to do.

"'Tis for them to say," declared Mr. Major. "Of course 'tis a thing of the far future. For my part I think she's a very good, kind-hearted little girl. But won't they look higher?"

"Farmer will be very well satisfied, I do believe," said the youth. "He married when he was nineteen and never regretted it, for I've heard him say so. But Mrs. Honeywill sets terrible store by Deb, as well she may do, and I ban't so sure how she'll take it. Deb says I'm to tell 'em on my eighteenth birthday; and that I'm going to do."

The great hour duly came and with it Ned's announcement. He put it off until after supper at Berry Farm, and then, at a nod from Deborah, exploded their secret in the ears of her parents. Ned insisted upon the girl being beside him at the moment of the confession, though she did not wish to be; for at such moments of revelation a maid's own mother may seem a stranger, since when it comes to the unveiling of the heart's heart, no human intimacy or relationship is ever close enough to make the thing

easy. To many high natures, indeed, it is never possible, and only their own soul can know its secrets.

But here was a thing that certainly had to be told—a thing of every day, a circumstance only fraught with precious wonder to Ned and Deborah themselves.

"We've got a tremendous piece of news, master," said the young man. "And how you'll take it, and how missis will take it, I can't guess. I'm feared to tell you; but 'twas long since ordained betwixt me and Deb that come my eighteenth birthday, it should out. In a word, we'm tokened, and have been this longful time; and we do hope and pray there's nothing against it. We're cruel fond of each other, and nothing will do but we marry, come presently. Long ways off still, of course. We wouldn't hurry it for anything, and for that matter I can't make a home for Deborah yet. But there it is; we won't keep it hid no more, and we've found it terrible difficult to keep it hid at all, owing to rejoicing so much about it."

"And we're an old engaged couple, dear mother," said Deborah. "You'd never believe it, but Ned offered for me two years agone. And I couldn't believe it myself—such a bit of a girl as me. But he would have it. And I love him with all my heart, and I hope you'll have nought to say against it, for we've long known we couldn't live our lives apart, haven't we, Ned?"

"Yes, we have; and the day I don't see her be a blank day for me; and I do hope, Mrs. Honeywill, you'll not set your face against it; for 'twould knock all the life out of us, I do assure you. There never was two creatures more wrapped up heart and soul in each other."

Deborah went to her mother and mutely continued the attack, by putting her face against the woman's and rubbing her little brown cheek on her mother's ear.

By a sort of intuition boy and girl both felt where the danger lay. Neither doubted that Nicholas Honeywill would yield. Ned's relations with his master were of the most friendly description, and

Nicholas never could deny his daughter anything. Indeed, he was not ill pleased. He had no particular ambition for Deborah, and to see her happy and married to a healthy, simple-minded, and steady youth was all that he desired or expected. She would be well off, and was to be regarded as a very eligible partner, even for a prosperous man; but her father waived prosperity in the case of Ned. He liked young Major well, and felt no concern for his future. With his gifts of health and energy and enthusiasm he must go far. He was a born farmer, and, as such, his master felt nothing but kindly interest and hearty belief in him. He had not the slightest objection to Ned as a son-in-law. Indeed, he looked farther ahead than the boy and girl, and saw that such an alliance might serve to suit him in more directions than one. His wife was a weakly woman, and in all probability would pass many years before Mr. Honeywill himself. Already, therefore, with ordinary human selfishness, he weighed the chances of content and comfort for old age, and saw in this proposition a very satisfactory solution to certain ultimate problems.

With Deborah's mother, however, it was otherwise. Before her husband's frank and friendly reception of the news; while he congratulated both the lovers, hugged Deborah, shook Ned's hand, and availed himself of the opportunity to pour out an extra nightcap of spirits, his wife could say but little. Her attitude, however, served to damp the splendour of the occasion, and, weighing her mother's silence against Mr. Honeywill's noise, Deborah went doubtfully to bed. Her betrothed also slept ill.

Because, while the weaker lamp, Mrs. Honeywill none the less carried the stronger flame. There were nightly conferences heard often, as a murmur, into the small hours by Deborah, who slept in a little chamber immediately above her parents; and these nocturnal conversations were often known to change the outlook of Nicholas Honeywill, so that the

promise or undertaking over the last pipe had not seldom vanished before the breakfast cup of tea.

When Mr. Honeywill announced that he had 'slept on' such and such a proposition, it meant in reality that he had slept a good deal less than usual, and that his wife had succeeded in changing his intentions or opinions before she suffered him to enter oblivion.

To-night Deborah knew that the murmur would be heard in her parents' room, and she was not mistaken. Without, of course, distinguishing any word, she was generally able to form an accurate guess at the discussion and its course. First there usually happened the gentle sound of her mother's voice, followed by loud, empathic utterances from her father. Then the gentle voice ran on, like water, and the loud voice gradually changed and thinned off, as though somebody was slowly drowning in the current. The duration of the contest varied; the climax was usually the same. There came single notes from the husband, and at last a few very loud, exasperated explosions. Sometimes an oath penetrated the ceiling and reached Deborah's ear. These frenzied expletives indicated that her fatehr had given in. Then followed a last ripple from the gentler throat, and silence dropped her curtain on the play.

But to-night Deborah could not understand the trend of events. She anticipated a very long discussion, and in her own bosom burned defiance of maternal authority or any other. She told herself that though her father might yield a score of times, yield she would not. For once her humble spirit was affirmed beyond any gainsaying or argument, for did not Ned signify her life? In this frame of mind she lent an indifferent ear to the parental duet, and told herself that, though her father and mother might discuss the situation until morning, the event was sure and beyond any human power to interrupt.

To-night, however, Mrs. Honeywill herself was half hearted, and made but a weak objection to the plans of the young people. She appealed to Mr.

Honeywill's pride—a poor choice, because pride was no quality of his. He lacked even that measure of the emotion to be called a virtue; and when, therefore, his wife considered the importance of looking higher for Deborah, reminded him of Deborah's expensive education, and dwelt upon their daughter's physical charm, spiritual grace, and many-sided fascination, Nicholas cut her short. He admitted all these things, but declared that they had no right or reason to look higher than a good, healthy, hearty, and honourable young man in their own station of life.

"Which Ned Major is," he declared; "and if you've a fault to find in him, I'll give it all up and send him about his business, and forbid the marriage to-morrow; but right well you know there's no real fault in him, and you're far too straight a woman to pretend that there is one. And what you'd like, in plain English, is for Deb to marry above her station; and that's a lapse from your usual lofty common sense. Besides all that, I'll be honest with you and tell you that I'm thinking of myself as well as them. The Lord's willed, seemingly, that I'm to be a widower, and outlive you by a doubtful number of years. Well, of course the man that had been your husband would never have no use for another woman, so I can't get away from the thought that, if I can keep Deborah, 'twould be a comfort to me—and doubtless a comfort to you to know it from your shining place. And if, in the years to come, Ned took her and took over Berry, I could bide with them and watch over 'em; and Deborah would do what a daughter can to ease my declining years."

Mrs. Honeywill turned away from him in her bed and gasped against the wall.

She was wounded to the very heart. Her husband had revealed a side of his nature unexposed until now, and unseen through nineteeen long years of wedded life.

"I see your plans," she said. "I'm sorry that I should linger here, but that's no fault of mine. Doubt-

less I shall be carried away pretty soon, then you can make your own arrangements; but you must excuse me for waiting the Lord's time. Certainly I've no further wish to stop—not after what I've heard to-night."

It was his turn to protest; but she refused to hear any apologies; in fact, bade him be silent rather sharply.

They lay in wretchedness side by side, and heaved alternate windy groans.

Their misery of soul was great until sleep had pity on them. The man was ashamed of what he had revealed, and felt quite crushed beneath her satire; the woman suffered two troubles. She was concerned to think her little maid must fall far short of the great match that she had sometimes hoped and dreamed; because, mother fashion, she had never perceived that Deborah was not for all markets; and she felt cruelly perturbed and amazed at her husband's cold-blooded calculations for a future she would not share.

Meanwhile, Deborah, with small ears pricked to listen, was puzzled that the usual melody of a talk between her father and mother after they had retired fell now into such unfamiliar cadence and such speedy peace.

CHAPTER IX

An evening came, but not until six months were past, when Mr. Major actually set out to visit Overgang and make friends with his own. With some serious qualms that desire was defeating conscience did he go, but none could say a word against the conduct of Samuel; indeed, all united to praise him, and Samuel himself, who heard from a friend concerning his father-in-law's express determination, had faced the probation in undeviating virtue, and he had nearly come well through it. But his evil star led him twice into Start Bay a fortnight before the six months were ended, and, unknown to Samuel, much of an unpleasant character was destined to happen as the result of this error. Now he and Lydia knew that the time set by Mr. Major was past, and they waited with no small anxiety for his advent. It was thanks largely to Lydia that Sam had come through the ordeal so successfully. Indeed, she felt proud of herself, and believed that after so long a period of well doing, her husband would backslide no more. In the matter of beer, his behaviour had certainly been beyond all praise, and even at Christmas time none saw Sam so much as exhilarated. He had worked hard and saved money. All this Lydia knew, but she did not know of the recent nocturnal raids on Start Bay. Indeed none at Brixham so much as guessed it, for the reputation of the 'Night Hawk' had undergone a change. It was the unscrupulous Billy Trust who thus tempted his skipper on certain dark winter nights to trade upon their improved credit, and excellent financial results rewarded them. The fish taken in these hauls were sold at Torquay; therefore none happened

to be the wiser. The sequel rested with other men directly involved.

It was half-past eight o'clock when John Major set out, and his way took him along the quay past 'The Sailor's Knot.' He had come back unexpectedly from the Land's End, and it struck him that his visit, partaking thus of a surprise, might be all the more welcome to Lydia and her husband.

Now, however, as he approached the inn, Mr. Major perceived two fishermen in front of him. They passed ahead under a lamp-post, and the light flashed upon their hats and shoulders. He did not, however, recognise them until he was quite close; but then they spoke, and he heard Samuel Brokenshire bid the other go and return quickly. Thereupon Billy Trust went his way down to the harbour and Samuel entered 'The Sailor's Knot.'

This unexpected incident arrested Mr. Major's progress. He could not find reasonable fault with Brokenshire for calling at an inn, but he had counted upon finding him at home to-night. He considered his course, and determined to leave Sam a clear half-hour. Then he would satisfy himself that he had left Mr. Munday's bar.

As he hesitated, the ragged form of Dick Varwell glowed for a moment in the stream of light that shone out of 'The Sailor's Knot'; then he entered and disappeared. Others followed him, and the burly Mr. Tribble was of the number.

John Major lighted his pipe, looked at his watch, and went down the quay. A slow and heavy feeling of disappointment at this incident got hold upon him. No spark of imagination could be said to belong to Mr. Major, and yet he had often dwelt through the night-watches on this reconciliation; he had anticipated it with interest and not without emotion. He thrust the present accident out of his mind as a thing of no account. He tramped the deserted quay, marked Billy Trust return and enter the inn, heard a clock chime twice.

Upon the stroke of nine, assuring his soul very steadfastly that Samuel was now home again, Mr. Major knocked out his pipe and set off for Overgang. But he had to pass the public-house before he reached it, and it happened now that he did not pass, but entered.

Much had fallen out while the fisherman walked up and down under King William's statue, and now John Major found himself thrust into the very heart of a broil that shattered his own project and sent him home an angry and unhappy man.

A tragedy burst upon 'The Sailor's Knot' while Lydia's father smoked his pipe, and an evening that began in peace ended with such a storm as Mr. Munday's house of entertainment had never known until that night.

When Brokenshire went in, his second hand, Mr. Mutter, with another fisherman or two, had already arrived, and the innkeeper was bargaining for a very singular crab taken in a trawl on the preceding day. He offered a shilling, but the owner demanded eighteenpence. The bargain was struck at one and three, with a pint of beer thrown in. Then Dick Varwell and Mr. Tribble arrived. The latter had news for Brokenshire. Tribble usually declared himself on the side of those who made free with Start Bay; but he was a timid spirit in war, though noisy in peace, and now he came with a warning to Samuel.

He beckoned Brokenshire aside, and broke to him some bad news.

"You'll do well to clear out of this and get home, or else to sea afore the trouble comes. There's an ugly storm brewing for you, and it's like to burst here any minute. Your last little jaunt have given you away, and since they can't catch you on the sea, they be coming to have it out ashore."

"Let 'em. We're good enough for all the crabbers at Hall Sands and Bee Sands too, I reckon," answered the master of the 'Night Hawk.'

"Well said, Sam!" cried Dick.

"That resolute black beggar, Chris King, he is bringing 'em over; and there's spies about that ban't on your side, so they'll know where to find you. King's got proofs, and he says he's going to have 'forty shillings or a month' out of you into the bargain," continued Tribble.

Sam's eyes blazed. He and King had long been foes.

"By God, he shall then! And I'll see what we can do for our side."

Brokenshire called Mutter, and when, some minutes later, Billy Trust and other friends joined the throng, they heard the news and felt acutely interested.

Mr. Munday, quite ignorant of the pending catastrophe, showed his new crab to a fisherman.

And then four strangers entered together. They whispered at the door, looked about them, marked Brokenshire with his companions, and then came up to the bar.

Munday knew none of them, but Tribble did. The big man already began to feel alarm. But after his many valiant utterances concerning Start Bay and illegal fishing, he could not well retreat at this crisis.

King paid no heed to Tribble. He began a general discourse intended for other ears, but addressed to Mr. Munday.

"We've stepped over from Tor Cross to say a thing or two to a man not a mile from this bar. And we've come to do what the law's too weak to do by the look of it. It may seem a very fine joke to sneak the living of other men by night, and hang out false numbers and hide your lights, and tell lies if you're caught at it; but we at Tor Cross reckon it's neither worse nor better than dirty shop-lifting; and we also reckon the man that would steal other men's fish, would just so soon steal the watches out of their fobs. That's what we think, and we want a certain crooked chap who sails out of Brixham to know it."

"And who might he be, Chris King?" asked Samuel, gripping an empty pot.

"He's a hookem-snivey blackguard called Sam Brokenshire," answered the big black man; "and I've come here to-night to pay off a score or two against him; and see if he's so brave face to face with an honest man as he is by night on the sea with them other rascals that go in his boat."

"Well, I won't keep you waiting," answered Brokenshire. "You've been fretting your heart out for this a longful time, and I've heard what you've been saying all about too. I've laid low of late, for private reasons, but this lets me out I reckon; and the man as calls me a hookem-snivey blackguard's put himself outside law."

He walked up to King and hit him on the chest. The longshoreman countered on Sam's head and knocked his cap off. In a moment, as though this was the signal, the others fell on Saul Mutter, Trust, and Varwell, and the din and dust of battle swiftly rose. Mr. Tribble, whose great fists had banged many a table, but nothing else, got into a corner, where he escaped with a few kicks as the fighters whirled round him. He towered there with his sheep's eyes rolling and his red, shaking wattles turned to white. Dick Varwell had no power of muscle, and his lean carcase was soon in the sawdust with a bloody nose; but the other men were more equally matched. A Brixham fisherman quickly engaged Dick's conqueror, while Billy Trust and Mutter fought each his furious crabber; but the middle of the public bar was entirely occupied with Sam and Mr. King. They were both too large for such a narrow arena. Pots and glasses rolled and crashed upon the floor, while the men swayed this way and that against the walls. As often as this happened, Mr. Munday's museum suffered, and before the battle was ended many of his treasures, in splintered ruins, strewed the bar. A policeman had run up in response to the publican's shrill summons; but he was elderly,

and doubted the powers of one among so many. Therefore he looked in and then hurried out again and blew his whistle. Loafers ran up from the darkness at sound of the hubbub, and the combatants were forcibly separated, long before any but Mr. Varwell could be said to have had enough. Mr. Mutter had nearly beaten his crabber, while another Start Bay man was getting the better of Mr. Trust. King and Brokenshire punished each other very badly, and when John Major elbowed his way through the crowd, he saw his son-in-law sitting in a corner bleeding from mouth and ears. The men had closed and fallen just before being separated, and King's arm was broken by contact with an iron-legged table. Immense damage to the decorations of the bar were also done, and a space of time, not much exceeding two minutes, had sufficed largely to ruinate the famous chamber.

John Major did not stay. He marked the scene, learnt that certain crabbers had come over to fight with the crew of the 'Night Hawk,' and observed that they had effected their purpose. Then he abandoned his own enterprise and went home. He was much distressed and especially puzzled before the ways of Providence in connection with his daughter.

The police appeared a few minutes after John Major left 'The Sailor's Knot,' but several of the combatants had departed before they did so. Billy Trust, with Saul Mutter and their opponents, escaped through a side door. Mr. Tribble also succeeded in doing the like; but King had to go to the cottage hospital, and two policemen desired to convey Samuel to the station.

He absolutely declined to go, however, and Dick Varwell, rising from his temporary resting-place under the table, argued with wide technical knowledge to show why Mr. Brokenshire should be allowed to depart in peace. It was explained and admitted that the Start Bay men first outraged law and order. They had indeed come over with that

object. To punish a man who, under gross provocation, had defended his good name in the only possible manner, was an outrage and quite contrary to law. Moreover, everybody knew where Samuel dwelt, and if a warrant was issued, it must be easy to serve it. Tumbledown Dick gained his point, and Samuel, blind in one eye, was led home to vinegar and brown paper. The inn was shut up an hour before closing time, and Mr. Munday did not disdain to drop a tear amid the ruins of so many unique treasures.

Next morning policemen arrived on the hillside at Brixham, and every casement framed a woman's head, from the top of Overgang to the bottom, as the officers drew up at Mr. Brokenshire's home. Samuel was wanted, not for the riot of the preceding evening, but for poaching in Start Bay, and the evidence amply justified a warrant. The battered Brokenshire knew it and raised no question.

"'Twill be the choice of a fine or a fortnight," he said to his distracted wife; "the pitcher's went to the well once too often. Keep up your pecker and don't expect me again for a bit. I've often counted on this happening, and I shall go to prison as a protest. Uncle Titus will look after you."

She wept and called upon him to consider his child, and a second presently to be born. But Sam was firm.

"Right's right," he said, "and I'm going to brave it out; and very likely they'll change the law upon what I shall tell 'em in open court."

After a few personal directions as to money and credit while he was away, Samuel departed; and on the following morning Lydia learned that her husband had only erred in one particular of his prophecy. Despite his explanations and arguments, an irate Bench had ordered Samuel to prison for a month. He was indeed offered the option of a fine, but he refused to pay it.

CHAPTER X

Among the many issues involved by Brokenshire's misfortune was a minor one affecting his uncle. It came about curiously, and originated in the altered demeanour of Lydia's father. After his bitter experience, Mr. Major took life so much to heart for a time and sank in a taciturnity so unusual and so extreme, that many were concerned for him. A man of ready speech and cheerful countenance under the hard strokes of chance, he endured this last blow ill, and though he preserved silence on the subject, and rarely dicussed it, even with Mr. Gilberd, his first familiar, none could fail to note a change. She who felt this most nearly was John's sister, and her brother caused Emma many uneasy hours. At first Mrs. Michelmore was concerned for him, though his melancholy and silence were not in themselves unpleasant to her. The melancholy she actually enjoyed, and the silence gave her a larger personal freedom of speech. She talked and wept more than usual, and she felt better for it; but the sustained gloom of John, together with his unexampled patience under her conversation, left its mark presently, and she began to wish that he would be himself once more. He was well in body, but a foreign gloom, unbroken by any dayspring of light or evening glow, crowded down upon him. He came and went from sea, and displayed a stolid and unbroken darkness and indifference of spirit. On Sundays he attended church and saw Lydia and her boy there; but prayer did not visibly change or cheer him. Ned came to see his father when he could, and his visits were also powerless to lift Mr. Major. The young man

confessed to Mrs. Michelmore that he was much concerned before this phase.

During three weeks this state of things continued, and then Emma, from uneasiness waxed into desperation. With an effort she even essayed a little cheerfulness; but John, perceiving the attempt, turned upon her and bade her be not light-minded, an admonition that caused his sister acute annoyance and even woke her to anger.

There occurred between them two further scenes of a nature unpleasant, and then Emma began seriously to fear for her brother's mind, and to doubt if life could much longer run upon this painful pattern. She pondered much with herself by night, and the vision that filled the foreground of her melancholy cogitations was that of Titus Peach. A sort of slender thread bound them still, but, on reviewing the events of the last year, Mrs. Michelmore perceived that his visits had been few and far between. Even when accident brought them together, she could not remember any very recent ardour or persistence in the attitude of the tanner to herself. For this, however, she did not blame Titus. She surveyed a period of three years, and observed that for two-thirds of it he had persevered gamely in his attentions. It was only of late—during the last twelve months or so—that he had cooled, or appeared to cool.

Mrs. Michemore now felt that she had taken Titus too lightly. She experienced no immediate desire to become much more friendly, but she told herself that she respected Mr. Peach for his good qualities and simple-heartedness; she assured herself that a little more suavity on her side was called for at this juncture. She had a growing and dreadful conviction that her brother was about to become mentally afflicted, and she felt that, when this final disaster descended upon the family, her lot, if still unfriended, must be heavier than she could bear. She decided to show a little consideration for the old admirer, and

even offer some slight scraps of fuel to his dwindling flame. She did not, however, propose to commit herself over much, or encourage him to anything like a definite hope. Her design was to move cautiously, with one eye upon her brother, one upon Mr. Peach. If John presently returned to his true self, Titus might be suffered to recede again; but if, on the other hand, her brother became insane and vanished from among men, then she believed that Mr. Peach would still rise to be the evening star of her own unfortunate days, and even bring with him a little peace at the last.

Her design matured within the recesses of Mrs. Michelmore's despondent soul; but to execute it proved less easy than she anticipated. She had not seen Mr. Peach for a month, and though she now looked for him pretty sharply, when she went out shopping or upon other business, he did not appear. Once the widow actually went out of her way to pass the barking yard, but Titus happened to be elsewhere; and once she saw him approaching down the high street of Brixham, and made certain that he had seen her; yet the event appeared to prove Mrs. Michelmore mistaken, for Peach, with his face full of business, hurried down a side street before he reached her.

Time passed, and John did not mend. He seemed to be travelling through a dark valley of mental trouble, and his sister felt confirmed in her opinion that Mr. Major was about to lose his mind and sink into living death.

Then her long-sought opportunity arrived, and she met Titus Peach emerging from his own dwelling. They were bound in the same direction, and he suited his pace to hers.

She was somewhat agitated at the beginning of the conversation, and a certain air of preoccupation about the man did not help her to calmness; while he, little knowing the mind of Mrs. Michelmore, failed to understand her tremor. But he, too, was not al-

together sorry for the meeting. He had long anticipated it, and designed now to indicate a definite modification of his own attitude.

They discussed the weather and the prosperity of the country-side. Then Mrs. Michelmore found her opportunity, and began to talk of John Major.

"No doubt a man such as yourself have marked the difference that's come over him of late," she said. "Not that he was ever what you'd call a light-hearted creature—no Major was ever that from the cradle onward. Still, for calm sense and patience and trust in Providence, he stood alone till the day your poor nephew was locked up. But now he's a changed man, and 'tis my belief that Providence have pretty well done with him, and he've seen his best days."

"You oughtn't to say any such thing," declared Mr. Peach. "Providence have never done with anybody so long as they've got a spark of life left in 'em—least of all with such a man as your brother. If he's dark, 'tis along of his daughter; and, until he forgets and forgives, he'll bide dark. I know what she feels about it—none better; for she's grown to be a daughter to me now, you might say."

Mrs. Michelmore's heart sank a little.

"Have you seen John lately?" she asked.

"Can't say I have."

"Then you can't judge. But I know only too well what's in store, if something don't happen soon. He'll go like Uncle Stooks went. Yes, he'll go that way sure as death, and we shall lose him. I see it coming."

But Mr. Peach was strangely lacking in sympathy.

"I've got to hate gloomy subjects a good bit of late," he answered. "One looks to the young more and more as one grows older. Our own generation do take such a black view of everything, and it's bad for the nerves, and shocking bad for faith. Now Lydia, with all ther troubles thick upon her, have got a bit of her father's hope, and she bears it bravely, and looks forward to this job being the turning-point

in my nephew's career. She wouldn't let me have any peace till I forgave him; so I've done it, and I hope with her that Samuel will be a reformed character when he comes back."

Mrs. Michelmore felt a flutter of actual resentment at this speech. Titus quite failed to please her; yet, after a moment's silence, she determined to make one more effort.

"Yes, the young are very well, despite the cares and worries of 'em; but I can't say myself I've ever been in the habit of turning to 'em for peace and quiet. 'Tis strange how things come to pass, and we never know where wisdom lies. Us haven't chanced to meet now for a good bit, though I've often had my mind upon you; and of late, since John got into such a terrible gloomy vein of mind, and his voice seemed to go out of him, as if dumbness was to be the next thing, I've called home oftener and oftener the many bits of wise wisdom that I've heard fall from you."

Mr. Peach acknowledged the compliment, but it astonished him, and he did not conceal surprise.

"My word!" he said. "I should never have thought it."

"Yes, I feel so," she told him.

He puffed out his breath uneasily. Life had not stood still with Mr. Peach, and in its progress the figure of Emma Michelmore no longer filled a prominent position. He had definitely abandoned all idea of marriage. An immense new interest was awakened by Lydia Brokenshire and her child. The little boy had taken mightily to Mr. Peach, and had also shown a tactful fondness for the shell grotto in his great-uncle's garden. Lydia and her son frequently visited him, and he assured her that they could not come too often.

"I'm hearing things," replied the sail-tanner after a pause. "Who knows? 'Tis just possible that if you'd spoke to me like that eighteen months to two years since, that history would have been altered

long ago; but I'm like your brother here and there, and I'll always trust Providence to bring about the right thing in its own way and its own time."

The utterance admitted of two constructions, and Mrs. Michelmore took the wrong one.

"You're right, as you generally find yourself, I suppose. It have been a great blessing to me in my woful life to know that I'd won your high opinion. But, of course, 'twasn't for me to push the friendship faster than you thought proper. Still, I'm very glad to hear I've still got a place in your thoughts, I'm sure. No doubt the right thing will happen in God's good time."

But Titus objected strongly to this line of argument. Despite Emma's vagueness, he perceived that she now desired to revive a friendship that he had long regarded as dead. His ambitions and inclinations were changed completely; he even marvelled that he could have courted this careworn and mournful-voiced woman. Personally, Titus was feeling himself to be a good deal younger and brisker of late; but Mrs. Michelmore, on the contrary, appeared to have aged in body if not in mind since last he enjoyed conversation with her. He grew a little impatient under these advances. He resented them, and even told himself that they were indecent. He strove to hit on some delicate, but definite, speech that should make clear to her it was impossible to renew even the old nebulous understanding. She had always preserved a studious vagueness towards the problem; and she was evidently prepared to continue in it. In coarse words Mrs. Michelmore was hedging; but Mr. Peach had long wearied of that attitude. To clear the air and extricate himself for ever was the immediate task before him.

He considered, and answered in a parable.

"My seafaring cousin—him that's captain of a Dieppe cargo boat nowadays—was to the Indies in early life, and he picked up many a bit of Indian

wisdom there," began Titus. "And one thing he dearly liked to repeat was this: 'You never can tell the mind of a woman—or a cow.' On the surface such a saying don't sound civil to the female sex; but it's better than civil: it's true. And so it came about that I never knew your mind, do what I would and try as brave and obstinate as I might to get at it. And, as years passed, I said, 'Such good things be not for me'—meaning you. So there it is; though as to respect, I shall never lose a terrible far-reaching respect for you. And here's my way, and I've been greatly pleased to have a bit of talk again, and I hope John will mend afore long. Such men as him be almost so scarce as such women as you. Good morning, good morning, Mrs. Michelmore!"

He hurried from her, and did not look back. He just heard her say "Good morning" faintly; and, when he was round a corner and out of sight, he uttered a great expiration of breath, took off his hat, and wiped his forehead.

As for the woman, she stared after him a moment. Then she tightened her lips and went on her way. She was exceedingly glad that none had seen this interview or marked the sequel. She was moved, and even indignant. She hurried home presently, secreted herself, and wept. When her brother returned from sea on the evening of that day, she was still perturbed. She felt an injured, almost an outraged woman; but John Major, upon whose ears her wrongs were poured, filled his sister's cup, for he showed no sympathy whatever, and, indeed, blamed her and not the sail-tanner. He said several severe things, and ended thus:

"'Tis all in vain you speak so acidly against Titus now. You ought to have remembered a bit ago that men ban't built of patience. And if patience be a vartue most times, 'tis little better than madness where a wife's the question, and you've got well into your second half-century. How could you expect

him to wait while you blew hot and cold, and age tightened, like a vice, on the pair of you?"

"Hot I never did blow," said Emma. "I know what becomes a self-respecting woman, if I know nothing else."

"Well, then, if you blew cold, how the mischief did you think any man was going to stand it for two years? Of course he reckoned you was against marriage, and of course he gave up the thought of it. And now, because you find his mind turned to other things, you talk this nonsense about him."

"I'm sorry I troubled you, I'm sure," said Mrs. Michelmore. "You'm changing yourself that quick and cruel, that soon——in fact, 'twas only because I feared for the future I tried to give the man a helping hand. However, there was no call to him to be rude—nor you either. I believe I can take a hint so quick as any other female."

"Well, then, take it and leave the poor soul in peace. Peace, I say; but how's there going to be peace for him with his nephew locked up? And as to my changing—we're all changing, Emma. And if you've changed your mind touching Peach, what is there strange that he should have changed his mind touching you?"

Mrs. Michelmore's bosom rose and her eyes grew moist with anger rather than sorrow.

"If you can't see how it looks to a modest woman, I can't show you," she answered. "And since you've made up your mind to trample on me to-day—like everybody else, seemingly—I may as well give you a bit of the truth too. And that is that Titus Peach be taking your place in your daughter's affection. You've flung her off, along of some silly, far-fetched nonsense only known to your God; but Peach, faulty and false though he may be, is drawn close as wax now to Lydia and to Lydia's child. He's took your place, in a word, and you'll never be able to win it back now—never—never! He's a better father to your daughter than ever you was; so that's tit for

your tat; and since you can so far forget your manhood as to say that I let Titus Peach dangle like a puppet on a Christmas-tree for two years, I can turn on you and tell you that you've lost your daughter and your grandson both; and serve you right! So now, then!"

She panted after this long speech, but it provoked no heated retort. Mr. Major was too astonished at the actual information to be angry with the informer. Great issues to him were involved in this revelation; immense secret hopes were threatened. He stared at Emma, and put his hands up to his forehead as though she had struck him upon it. If she had desired to create a sensation, her wish was amply gratified; but the luxury of further speech did not follow. Indeed, John Major said not a single word. He rose, regarded Mrs. Michelmore as one might regard a telegraph-boy who has brought ill news, and then walked out of the house. He departed full of a design to see Titus Peach before he slept; but the night air cooled his mind, spoke reason to him, and indicated the justice of the situation. He throbbed to think of Lydia a daughter to any man but himself; he did not trust himself to think at all about his grandchild. He made no effort to see Mr. Peach at once. For two hours he tramped a lonely road under Overgang; then he changed his mind again, and every instinct cried out to see Peach and hear him talk of Lydia.

It was now half past ten o'clock, and John Major, fearing that Titus might be in bed, made haste to reach him.

A light burned in the hall; but none answered his ring. Then a woman looked out of an upper window.

"Mr. Peach be out to his nephew's house to Overgang," she said, not recognising the visitor. "If you want him, you'll find him at Mr. Brokenshire's. He's mostly there comforting the poor young wife till Samuel Brokenshire's out of prison again."

The father heard, hesitated, and then returned to his home.

CHAPTER XI

Ned and Deborah found the time of waiting begin to torment them, and Mr. Honeywill cared not how soon they married, since it was now understood that their union would make no difference to the work of Berry Farm. Both would stop there, and Nicholas doubted not that his son-in-law must in the progress of time succeed him. But Deborah's mother desired delay. She had, however, grown accustomed to the engagement, and perceived that no power of hers could change her daughter's purpose.

There fell a day, one week before Brokenshire returned to his home, when young Major went to see Lydia with a twofold object. He desired some sympathy for himself, and he wished to bestow sympathy upon his sister. She was not well, and he arrived on a Sunday afternoon to learn whether her health mended.

"Only six more days," she said, "though they will seem more like years than days to me. Then Sam comes home again. Oh, Ned, you'll do what you may, won't you? Everybody who loves him must help all they can to keep him straight after this."

"Don't you worry," he answered, picking up little John and dancing him on his knee. "Sam's had his lesson. He'll take jolly good care not to run into a fix like this again."

"'Tis the cruel disgrace of it."

"Don't you believe that nonsense. There's no disgrace to name. Law and order have come to be such strict things that 'tis very hard to help kicking over the traces and breaking them. But a few years back Sam would have been the most law-abiding chap. He's only sporting—never wicked."

She shook her head.

"That's the rubbish Dick Varwell talks. I wish my husband would drop that man. He's a bad friend for any respectable person."

"Don't believe it," answered her brother. "Dick's all right. He only says the things he does say to shock people and make 'em wake up. Of course he don't believe the half of them himself. And, any way, out of friendship for Sam, he's working in the 'Night Hawk' till the skipper comes back. Billy Trust told me that there's not a cleverer chap in the fleet than Tumbledown Dick when he likes. And you oughtn't to blame Dick, for he's doing this only for your husband's sake. You know how he hates work."

But Lydia was not grateful.

"You mind what you're doing, Ned. Nobody has ever had cause to thank Varwell in the long run for anything. He's a dangerous, useless, wicked man, and I'm very sure that but for him Sam would never have come into this cruel trouble at all."

"Be cheerful and hopeful," he said. "I heard you was poorly, so I thought I'd come to cheer you up a bit."

"I'm all right. The new baby is promised in a funny sort of way to Uncle Titus. He's wrapped up in Johnny; but just because he is Johnny, Mr. Peach won't regard him as his very own. But if baby's a boy, he's to be called 'Titus,' and his fortune will be made, I reckon. Mr. Peach is a kind, gentle creature and I'm very fond of him. He's taken father's place in my life, you might say."

Ned sighed.

"You don't know, and never will know, the times that I've been at father to come; and I don't suppose you know how terrible near he was to coming —actually on the way. He'd got his conscience clear about Sam, and he was longing with all his heart after you and Johnny here. Then—actually on the way, Lydia—he ran right into that row at 'The Sailor's Knot' three weeks ago. And he turned back,

and 'twas the hardest struggle that ever he had with himself to do so, for so he told me. He's a changed man since, I do believe."

"I can't understand and never shall. What have I done? That's the hard thing. He's forgiven me for running away with my husband. Then what's to keep him off me? I'm not Sam's keeper: he keeps me. And because he's made a good few foolish mistakes, as the big-hearted men best worth loving most often do, why should father stop away from me and my child? I can't see the sense of it, or the religion of it, or anything."

"You know what a stickler he is, and what faith he's got. He believes that nought can happen but for good."

"Then how could it be but for good if he came here? Of course it would be for good."

Ned shrugged his shoulders.

"He'll come: that I do believe; but 'twill depend on Samuel when and how."

"He'll see me changed enough."

"He's terrible interested in the child. Such simple hope as he's got. He said to me once that 'twouldn't surprise him to sail with his own flesh and blood in the 'Jack and Lydia' yet, afore he comes ashore for good. Of course he meant your Johnny here."

"He needn't count on that," answered the mother. "Johnny's fond enough of the water, but Samuel isn't fond of it for him. Sam often says that no son of his shall go to sea if he can stop it."

"You can't stop it if 'tis in 'em. Any child of his be like to love the sea."

"Johnny does; but he'll never go that way, I hope."

After further talk and some failure on Ned's part to prophesy smooth things, he turned to his own affairs and explained how Mrs. Honeywill stood between him and early marriage.

"Deb's father is all for it, and of course we are," he said; "but Mrs. Honeywill seems to think that

waiting is easy, though we've tried pretty hard to undeceive her. We shall have to borrow Sam's 'Night Hawk,' like you did, Lyddy, if she holds out against us much longer."

At the name of his father's boat Johnny made energetic efforts to leave his uncle's knee, and, when set down, he paddled off to a corner, picked up a little model ketch and held it up.

"Night Hawk! Night Hawk!" he said.

"So it is, then, and a real good likeness, too," declared Ned, examining the toy.

"Mr. Mutter made it for him. He's a very clever man with his hands. All the same, I didn't much like Johnny having it, for I don't want anything near him that's likely to make the child care for the sea. I hope he'll be like you and hate it, Ned."

"You mustn't wonder if he loves it," answered the other, handing his treasure back to Johnny. "If his father can't choke him off, none will. 'Tis very certain our father will try to egg him on to seafaring. Why—talk of—— There's father himself coming up the steps!"

It was true. In the silence of the Sunday hour, while Overgang drowsed save for the squeak and grunt of a harmonium in one cottage, there fell the sound of heavy feet climbing the four steps that led from the footway to Mr. Brokenshire's front door. John Major had come at last. He knocked, then turned his back on the entrance and tapped out his pipe on the rail. He was clad in Sunday black.

Lydia rose and turned very pale. Ned thought that she was going to faint, but the shock quickly passed and she prepared to go to the door.

"I'll hook it by the back way," said her brother. "Of course, father knows I come here; but it isn't for that. I'll run for it now, because nobody's any right to be by when he comes to you. Thank God he has! 'Tis great news, Lyddy, and 'twill rejoice Deborah more than anybody."

His sister hesitated.

"Go if you must. Perhaps you'd better."

The child heard the knock.

"Uncle Titus come!" he said.

"'Tisn't Uncle Titus, Johnny; 'tis dear grandfather," answered his mother.

A third summons sounded, and Lydia prepared to answer it.

"Don't you cry," urged Ned; "nought to cry about."

Then he went away through the back yard, and Johnny, who had learned of late to turn the handle of the front door, now marched out to do so.

A moment later he had opened it, and his grandfather's eyes were lowered to his face. The child resembled Samuel Brokenshire; he looked up fearlessly, and laughed when Mr. Major put a heavy hand on his head.

"Be your mother in, John?" asked the old man.

At the same moment Lydia approached, and her father took her into his arms.

"At last!" he said. "I've long wanted to come to you, and I've long prayed to be allowed to come, my Lyddy, but the prayers have been answered but now. I've had to hold off all these years, and hard—very hard—it's been. And at last, when I'd pretty well given up hope, and when them as cared was tired of telling me I was wrong—at last I've got orders from Headquarters, Lyddy. Your father be going to look after you now for so long as he've got the power."

Lydia broke down, and her son howled to see her do so. He doubled his fists and began to beat Mr. Major's leg with all his strength.

"Beast! Beast!" he shouted, "to make my muvver cry!"

They sat together presently, and Mr. Major, after the fashion of his kind, was egotistical, and explained at great length the mysterious workings of Providence upon his responsive spirit. No egotism marked the recital. He felt that it was only a proper prelude to

this sequel. He desired to explain to Lydia why he had held aloof from her for so long, and why at last in this crisis he had come.

She listened to the story with deep interest. Particularly did she lend ear to her father's description of his spiritual tribulations since Samuel's disgrace.

"So heavy has it weighted upon me, that I've been no company for man or woman," he told his daughter. "I've liked the night better than the day, which in itself be the sign of a mind in trouble; I've shunned men and hidden myself from them; I've rebuked my sister for pestering me with her silly affairs; and then she's turned the tables on my by telling me that another has taken my place in your heart, and that poor, dear Mr. Peach—as good a man as ever walked, however — was coming to be a second father to you."

"Never, never!" vowed Lydia, though in her heart she hid the knowledge that the thing was true.

"But don't think 'twas Aunt Emma finally did the trick, Lyddy. No; nothing could from without. And for a good few days I withstood even the cruel, sad thought of Titus Peach taking my place where I ought to be; but then—last night, in fact—came the blinding light. 'Twas even so Paul seed it. And a voice come too, and I knowed, though no words exactly reached my senses, what the sound of the voice meant. It signified that I was to hold off no longer, and that I wasn't to let Samuel and his ways and works stand any more between me and my daughter and my daughter's child."

"We called him John," said Lydia.

"Ay; and if you knew what I felt when I heard tell on it, you'd be very glad to think that you did so," he replied.

"And if the baby coming is a boy, he will be called Titus," she continued.

"Why not? But this here brave Johnny—do you mark how friendly we've grown a'ready? Look how he walks right up and comes betwixt my legs to

my waistband—God bless his brave eyes! Do he go up to Titus like that?"

"Just the same."

"But he didn't at first?"

"He's always known Uncle Titus since he was a baby."

"But he'll soon know me better—and like me better. 'Tis only nature, Lyddy. Let me see thicky boat, my hero."

Mr. Major pointed to the model of the 'Night Hawk,' and his grandson brought it to him. The old man was soon busy setting it to rights; and while he did so he talked to his girl.

"Never again; never again shall any earth-born cloud come between me and my own. You can't know what a cruel trial it have been. And I'm glad you can't. I've fretted, Lyddy; I've fretted at sea and ashore, and I've fitted up my eyes to my Maker, like a dumb dog to his master, and axed a thousand times why for both my young ones had to be took from me. But here's the answer; and now I know that neither of you be took, and that these things happened because they was the best that could happen for all of us."

Johnny now sat on Mr. Major's knee and showed the most fearless friendship. His curly hair stuck upon and spread over the old man's Sunday coat. He was playing with his dead grandmother's wedding-ring that Mr. Major carried on his watchchain.

"A brave boy, wi' fine limbs and a deep chest, 'an eyes so blue and honest as heaven. A fine, stout child; but you must cut off these here curls, Lyddy: they make him girlish."

"So Sam says; but he's so tiny yet. I've told my husband he must keep 'em till he's four. Uncle Titus is on my side. He likes them."

"Well," answered the fisherman frankly, "don't let's have no more of 'Uncle Titus' for the minute. 'Tis 'father' and 'grandfather' now, and a blessed minute to me, I warn 'e. God, He knows how I've

hungered after it. But I haven't half looked at you yet, nor seen what the little chap's got of you in him."

"He's all Samuel, they say."

The child suddenly laughed long and loud. He had just discovered Mr. Major's earrings.

"And they was put in my ears afore you was born, or your mother either, you butivul handful!" said his grandfather. Then, in an access of sheer animal love, the old man rubbed his grey muzzle against the child's cheek and felt its round softness thrill his heart-strings. Johnny wondered, round-eyed, but he took it well; and he took the three-penny-piece that Mr. Major had stowed away for this purpose still better. He waved it in his fat hand, and his mother put it safely away for him.

John Major relinquished the boy reluctantly, for Johnny would not stop alone with him while his mother went to make tea.

Lydia insisted on serving the meal in the parlour, though her father begged for the kitchen. They ate and drank; the woman grew light-hearted and happy; Mr. Major talked of nothing but the child.

"Seafaring blood o' both sides," he said. "'Tis as certain as anything in this world can be certain, Lyddy, that's he's cast for it. The very build of a fisherman. Stuggy and solid, like his old grandfather, that boy will be. Look at his short fingers and square hands. And see how he can hold!"

"He loves the harbour."

"Of course he does. And very proper he should —like all right-minded boys."

Lydia turned the conversation to her husband presently, but failed to keep it there.

"Upon the subject of Samuel I'm not come to speak, Lyddy—not yet. When he's back to his work, I mean to have a talk along with him—not as his father-in-law or anything of that sort, for he won't stand advice; but as your father and this boy's grandfather. I shall say my say in due season, and forget what he said to me a bit ago. But he must

listen to reason now, and I'm going to make him do it. Have you got one of they li'l blue guernseys for this child?"

"Yes, father. He puts it on before he goes out to play."

"I'd much like to see him in it," said her parent, and the garment was brought.

"Every inch a fisherman!" declared Mr. Major. "There ban't many inches yet, but a fisherman a'ready to his socks. Have 'e marked how clever he furls the sail of his boat? 'Tis in him, Lyddy; 'tis in him."

"Samuel——" began Lydia, but John raised his hand.

"Let it be sufficient that I've forgiven him even this last thing. And that was a good deal to do for me; because you know how jealous I am for Brixham and its good name and such-like. Tell him that I want to see him so soon as he can come; so no more on that head now. We've got to make up for a deal of lost time, you and me; so you'd best begin and tell me all about this boy and his ways—'tis a treat to see him let down his food—and what he thinks of life. A good son now, I warrant, though such a babby?"

"The best little son that ever walked, I'm sure." declared Lydia. "And he loves the very shadow of his father."

"And I hope he'll have better cause to do so henceforward. I wish we lived a bit nearer, but he'll soon find his legs carry him along to me when I'm home. Do he know my boat?"

"Yes," said Johnny's mother. "What's grandfather's boat called, lovey?"

The child had made a mighty meal and was now lying drowsy in Mr. Major's lap.

"I doan't knaw," he said.

"Yes, you do. Think a minute. What's mother's name?"

"Mrs. Bokensheer."

"Don't worry him," said John. "He shall come in the boat himself some day. Then he'll never forget the name no more."

"'Jack and Lyddy,' 'Jack and Lyddy,' 'Jack and Lyddy,'" cried the child suddenly.

He repeated the words like a parrot. His mother had whispered them to him under her breath while her father was talking.

"So it is, then! 'Jack and Lydia'! Clever boy!"

Mr. Major talked long, and rejoiced in the sound of his daughter's voice. He was very happy, and when Johnny fell asleep in his arms he refused to put him down.

He did not leave his daughter till night had fallen, and then found it difficult to say good-bye.

"I'm at home till evening to-morrow, so 'tis understood you eat your dinner along with us—you and that amazing child," said Mr. Major. He started, but turned back before Lydia had shut the door.

"Good-night again, my purty girl," he said. "And please your father by reading the ninety-eighth Psalm afore you shut your eyes. If 'twasn't fallen so late, I'd stop and read it to 'e, but my sister will be growing oneasy, and so I'd best get back-along with my news."

She promised to obey, and he went off repeating verses of his favourite pæan aloud:

"'*Let the sea roar and the fulness thereof; the world and they that dwell therein. Let the floods clap their hands; let the hills be joyful together before the Lord.*'"

CHAPTER XII

Though her reconciliation went far to brighten Lydia's heart, yet it did not serve to shorten the days that dragged between her and the return of Samuel. Not a few kindly spirits—chiefly men—cheered her loneliness, and said what they might to modify the situation. Tumbledown Dick, from his wide experience, scoffed at the punishment, and held it rather a feather in Mr. Brokenshire's cap.

"You mark me," he told Lydia, "Sam's sacrificed himself for the public good, and I'll bet you, or any other man or woman, my next pair of new boots that this business will call general attention to the wicked injustice of shutting Start Bay against Brixham. Such scandalous doings can't be carried on now that your husband has thrown a bit of light on 'em. And for his comfort, when he comes out, he shall hear that Trust and Mutter and me have been as busy as beavers lately. We've got some right down masterpiece of fish, and we've sold 'em for top prices. But I shall be glad when Sam's ready to sail again. This hard work be very bad for me, and it prevents my using my brain-power. It makes me hungry and sleepy, whereas I never want to be anything but thirsty."

Lydia always felt uneasy in the company of Mr. Varwell, but she had to suffer it on several occasions while Samuel was from home; and she was forced to listen to the vagabond's opinions. Sometimes they made her angry, sometimes they made her laugh. Unconsciously she was influenced by his mingled sense and folly to a general modification of views.

And then Sam returned—on an evening in autumn; and he was escorted to his home by a company of

well-wishers, which included Varwell, Trust, Mutter, and Mr. Tribble. They saw him to the door, and raised a cheer when Sam greeted Lydia on the top step.

"Now we've seen the man into the bosom of his family we'll be off and drink good luck to justice and down with all tyranny," declared Dick. "You've been a good deal divided, as the worm said, you two have; but Sam's sworn off prison for evermore—haven't you, Sam? Yes, I've got his words for it."

"Never, never again," cried the sinner devoutly. "Bear me out, Dick, that the first thing I said was that I'd never go to prison no more. Next time I'll pay the fine!"

They laughed and shouted, and then sank away and left Overgang to regain its customary peace.

Then the husband discoursed at length upon his experience, and Lydia remarked that disgust was the sole emotion he had brought home. Samuel declared himself as one grown savage with authority; he echoed Varwell, but he blamed Varwell exceedingly for letting him go to prison.

"I'd rather have sold the boat," he said, "than submit to such treatment. But I'll pay them back to the last insult—let me be hung if I don't."

She implored him to take another view, and told him how Tumbledown Dick prophesied that this incident would be likely to waken a general attention concerning Start Bay. But he raged on until weary of the subject; then he seemed suddenly to realise that he was at home again, and cast his wrongs behind him, and inquired after his wife and her health and the manner in which she had passed her lonely days.

Lydia kept the great news of Mr. Major's visit until Sam was tuned to hear it. Then she told him all, and he rejoiced, and desired, then and there, to speed off that he might share in John Major's amity. But his father-in-law was at sea, and a meeting had to be delayed.

"He took that kindly to Johnny that I thought

he'd never turn away from him," related Lydia. "Dear father couldn't put him down; and he said that never did he see such a young boy carry the very mark of the sea upon him. I do believe he'd like Johnny to be handed over to him to-morrow!"

"More fool him! He's daft about it, and always was. But I know a trick worth two of that. The bottom's knocked out of sail-trawling, and no sane man would bring up his son to any such dog's life or dog's wages. I'd sooner choke the kid than let him go to sea; and what's more, I'm properly sick of it myself."

Lydia stared at him.

"What else can you do?" she asked.

"That's what I want to find out," he answered. "But don't you heed me to-night; I'm full of prison air still. When I get on the water to-morrow, 'tis very likely I'll sing a different song. 'Tis too late I suppose for me to think of anything else now; but Johnny shan't be led no such wild-goose chase by his grandfather—not while his father's here to stand between. I'd plan a sporting life for him, if I could."

"Time enough, time enough," declared Johnny's mother. But she was saddened at this firm declaration. Samuel had not seen the old man and the child together; otherwise she thought he might have spoken less positively.

"'Tis all a miz-maze about children," summed up Samuel; "and a man's a fool to plan their lives afore they'm out of short coats. I say I'll do this and I'll do that with Johnny; but the time will come when he'll take the bit in his own teeth, like I done myself, and like every decent boy does; and he'll go his own way along with his own generation. The young lead the young nowadays—I've marked that. They haven't got no use for the older people; and they're right. The older folk be always a long span behind the age; that's why I was locked up. You've got to be in hot water half your time if you're on the side of progress—so Dick says, and 'tis true

enough. Men like me and Varwell get all the kicks and none of the half-pence; but them that come after will see what we were and what we stood for; and they'll pull down that long-nosed marble monkey on the quay some day, and put up statues to such as us instead. We may not live to see it; but our children may."

The spectacle of Tumbledown Dick in marble on Brixham Quay made Lydia laugh; and laughter it was that ended the day of Sam's return to her.

CHAPTER XIII

ANOTHER year passed by, and insensibly Ned Major grew to be more than a unit among the small band of workers at Berry Farm. Apart from the position he occupied as betrothed to Mr. Honeywill's only daughter, there had awakened between the farmer and the young man a very close and intimate friendship, based on sympathy and understanding. Ned, though he knew it not, exercised a growing power in the control of the farm that made older labourers jealous. But, when it came to argument, none was able to deny the youth's ability or his learning. He read, and remembered what he read. He applied his acquired knowledge for the good of his master, and Mr. Honeywill, who at first laughed at little innovations as harmless jokes, now laughed no more, but yielded old uses for new, and had the sense to admit that in some directions, if not in all, the modern way was better.

Ned, despite this energy, woke no lasting enmity among Mr. Honeywill's older hands. He was so ingenuous and simple hearted that no man could long quarrel with him. Moreover, others saw farther than could the youth himself see at present. Mr. Honeywill appeared well content to leave more and more in Ned's hands, and it required no great foresight to perceive that anon the farmer, always an easy man, would be well content to let his son-in-law reign in his stead.

Nicholas Honeywill was prosperous. Some guessed that but for his wife he would have felt inclined to leave Berry Farm on Deborah's marriage and retire to a smaller establishment; but Ned was still very young to thrust into authority. He had no natural

power of managing men, and rather chose a subservient position. Amiable to weakness he remained, and Mrs. Honeywill observed this clearly, so that when her husband speculated on the propriety of leaving their present home for some inland place beyond the din of the sea, his wife protested, and declined to consider any such step until another six or eight years had passed.

"He's still a child, for all his cleverness," she said. "And to put him in power would be as unkind to him as silly to us. He'll have his hands full with a wife in a year, and you can't expect him to set the farm afore Deborah till love have calmed down into use after the usual fashion. You've got to bide here a bit yet. And why not? You're as hale as most men of ten years younger, and, if you left here, you'd only be a nuisance to yourself and to me and to Ned Major and everybody else. You go on ruling till he's a bit older and you've found out if he's built to rule. For my part I reckon he's the sort that's happier with a stronger man over 'em than on his own hook. I may not be here to see, though my advice is good for all that."

This counsel the master followed; but in the matter of marriage he sided with Deborah against her mother. She and Ned desired no more delay, and, at last, they had their will. It was understood the youthful pair should wed after the coming harvest.

"When I married your mother, we'd saved the corn and the roots also," said Nicholas to his daughter. "Our honeymoon was the hunter's moon. A very good season for taking the yoke on your neck. So let it be. And you can both go off and enjoy yourselves to Exeter, or even Lunnon, if you like, for a week or two. Your mother ban't on our side yet; but you'll have to win her round and prove to her you're wiser than she thinks you, if not older."

The parents met when these details were settled. John Major told what he could do for Ned, and Mr. Honeywill explained his views as to the future. All parties to the match, indeed, were satisfied save Mrs.

Honeywill and Aunt Emma. The former hid her disappointment, since it was vain; the latter openly mourned any marrige union of a Major, and predicted that for that blighted race to seek perpetuation was open flouting of Providence. She had been more than usually lachrymose of late, a fact that Mr. Major marked when Ned and Deborah came to visit him one Sunday a month before their marriage.

The fisherman was now grown most cheerful, and his happiness contrasted sharply with Mrs. Michelmore's misery. He explained his sister to her face, and then went on to show the reason for his own content.

"'Tis no good asking your aunt not to be downcast," said John to his son. "You might so well ask me not to be trustful, or Deborah here not to be happy. 'Tis Emma's nature—you know 'tis so, Emma. And, mind you, long afore your own troubles fell thick and fast, you was the same. You was born courting trouble and stretching out your hands for it. You was always like a sporting dog on the scent, and you could sniff out coming misery weeks afore anybody else had catched sight of it. Her tears, however, roll off her like water off a shag's back. She sheds 'em as the tree sheds its leaves in autumn—because she's got to do it, and can't help it. Her meat and drink turn into tears, as another person's may turn into fat or muscle, and she's bound to shed 'em when they run over—ain't you, Emma? And besides that, certain curious things have happened to her lately—however, that's a delicate subject and no concern of yours."

"'Tis all true," said Mrs. Michelmore, "and I won't quarrel with your way of putting it. But one thing I will deny. I wasn't born with a black view of life. On the contrary, till marriage crushed it out of me, as well it might, I felt as gay as a bird. But to breed childer for the grave and to see all four drop, and their father after 'em—I'd like to meet with the woman as could ever be hopeful and cheerful again after such a come-along-of-it. And so, if them about to wed want

people to clap 'em on the back and say 'tis a fine thing, and that they'm in for a life-long holiday, they'd better not come to me, because I know different. Not that I want to be a cloud over anybody; only us must speak what we know, if we'm honest—either that or keep our mouths shut. And so will I do when I hear the name of marriage or the whisper of babbies. And for a Major to enter into these things after hearing the history of his family—however, the new generation larns by its own experience, not by ours."

"We know what a cruel time you had, Aunt Emma," said Deborah; "but 'tisn't given to us all to suffer so bad, I'm sure. Never was the like of what you had to put up with. You're a right down monument of trouble, and, as such, are a regular figure in the eyes of Brixham people."

Mrs. Michelmore was pleased by this flattery, but it would not make her yield the main point.

"True enough. I've borne what would have broke most females, and perhaps 'tis only right the people should know it and give me my share of credit; but my case be only the worst—the pick of the Major basket, of course. I had the Michelmore luck as well to fight against too, and, being only a mortal woman, couldn't do it, and went down according."

"Honeywills have very good luck," declared Deborah.

"Have they?" asked Mrs. Michelmore, regarding her nephew. "Don't you speak too soon as to that. If 'tis good luck to wed a Major, then signs and wonders may happen in the land; but I haven't heard of 'em doing so."

Thereupon Mr. Major bade his sister go and make the tea.

"I won't have these children frightened no more by you, you old night-bird," he said. "There's a very fair hope for 'em, and for all Christian creatures; and as for me, I'm glad to the heart that you young things be what you are and be going to do what you mean to."

Mrs. Michelmore left them, and John, after a few more general speeches, struck into the subject now grown nearest his ambition.

"They be coming to tea—all of 'em—the Brokenshires. I arranged to have us all together, because 'tis the last time till the wedding that we shall do so. Have 'e marked Johnny of late, Ned? Bless the child, you can see him grow."

"He's growing broad if not high," said Johnny's uncle. "He's a wonderful solid youngster, and always cheerful, so Lyddy says."

"A Major in all but colour," declared the old man. "And if a Major, then a seafarer."

"What about Ned, father?" asked Deborah.

"The exception to prove the rule," he answered. "Ned was a sport; but he'll throw true, and if ever you have a son, Deborah, he'll have his business on the water, and you must make up your mind to it."

Samuel, Lydia, their boy, and their new baby arrived in a few minutes, and the family party was soon sitting at tea in the kitchen. They had hardly begun to eat before Mr. Major returned artlessly to his favourite theme. Johnny sat on his lap, and formed the text.

"As I was saying to my son, you can't alter human nature. 'Twill out; and if 'tis banked up in one generation, or slips into some strange channel owing to those accidents that none can help, you'll soon find the race coming back to its own again."

"You can train the young shoot," answered his son-in-law. "And so shall I. You reckon that limb there"—he pointed to his son—"is cast for the sea. I reckon not. If I can show him how much better 'tis to keep ashore, I shall do."

"You won't frighten me, however," answered Johnny's grandfather. "Time was when I'd have agreed with you, and said the tree grows as the twig's inclined, but life have taught me wiser. 'Tis the fruit we can't alter, and the bed-rock pattern that a child's mind be built on. Take Ned here—didn't I

strive to bend him to the sea? But 'twas beyond human power to do it. Only a miracle could have made him a fisherman; only some direct meddling with the clay he's mixed of. And to do that would have been beyond all power but God's. So with this here blessed boy, not you will keep him off the sea if the blood calls to be afloat, and not I will make him a sailor if the land holds him."

"Who belongs to the sea but wouldn't come off it if he could?" asked Brokenshire. "We go into it green boys, and think 'tis all that silly books and silly parents tell us; but come we grow into men, we long to put away childish things; and a childish thing is the sea for any sane man. Let the sort as never grow up go for sailors. 'Tis no life for a man with brains. I'd sooner see Johnny in a good corner public house than sailing to sea—even with you, Mr. Major. And if you was to offer to exchange a snug little business ashore with him for his boat, there ban't a fisherman in Brixham, barring yourself, that wouldn't jump at the chance."

"'Tis what fell out last year, Samuel, that makes you say these things," answered John Major.

"'Twas a blessing in disguise then, if it have opened my eyes here and there," answered Sam. "'Twill be a fair fight, and no favour, over thicky youngster. I shall try to keep him ashore, and you'll try to drive him to sea. And time will show if he's got brains or not."

"You oughtn't to say that, Sam," cried Lydia. "'Tis as much as to say father haven't got brains."

"I haven't got strong ones," admitted Mr. Major. "All my intellects run into faith and trust. And that's a more restful way than fretting. The more brains, after a certain pitch, the more misery. Take Mr. Memery; take parson; take that poor mistaken creature, Dick Varwell. Such men think over-much and are miserable for it. They may pretend otherwise, but miserable they are; and even sensible beings, like Memery and the reverend Bewes, can't get con-

tentment. Of course Varwell's another order of creation: he's a good brain gone wrong. 'Tis the dreadful spectacle of a man turning his best gift against the God that gave it."

He prattled on; then Samuel stood up for Tumbledown Dick, and the conversation became political and heated. Ned strove to silence Samuel, and presently succeeded; but the amity of the entertainment was strained, and when the Brokenshires presently took their leave, Mr. Major shook his head and confessed that his son-in-law continued to cause him very great uneasiness.

"I thought last year would be the great lesson to bring Samuel in," he said; "but his opinions are in a very parlous state, as you see. They're the sort of dangerous gas that a match will set a light to. He's ripe for mischief; and the sooner that amazing child can get away to sea and escape from hearing such mistaken rubbish, the better for him here and hereafter. I shall watch after him like a cat watches a mouse."

"Lydia's on your side too," suggested Deborah; "and of course Ned is."

"I dare say Sam will change all his opinions again afore long, father."

"No, Ned; 'tis more than that. He's got a lawless vein, and there he's weak and there the mischief lies. There's an objection in the man to making money honestly. 'Tis commoner than you might think; 'tis at the bottom of all betting and such like. The money you get without earning it have a terrible strong attraction for such as Samuel. 'Tis what we call the sporting instinct. I've seen a lot of Sam lately, remember, and I've summed him up so well as I could. He went to Start Bay more because Start Bay was shut against him than for any other reason. If 'twas opened to-morrow, he'd have no more use for it. And if he gives up the sea—vain talk, of course—but if he did, what would be the next thing? Well, I won't answer the question, because you might say 'twas a very unchristian act to doom a man to wrong-

doing. But so far as I've got with Brokenshire, my faith in man's goodness have been put to a great pinch, and only come out of it whole by a wonder."

"I believe Sam will go as straight as a line from now, whatever stuff he may talk," declared Ned. "And after all, father, if you was to hear Dick Varwell talk when he's sober and in deadly earnest, you'd be the first to say there was a lot of reason in the things he tells about."

"Not at all," answered Mr. Major. "He's one of the vain sort that take reason for guide—a blind guide too, as Varwell shows in his own life and character. Distrust reason, like an ageing man distrusts his eyesight or his strength of arm. Our reasoning powers be the devil's playground. 'Tis there he's the busiest, and the less we reason and the more we believe, the weaker we make the enemy of man. Faith's the rock for every wise soul to stand upon, and if you two want to be a happy married pair, and a credit to your folk, and worthy of having a hand in the next generation, nail texts to your walls and nail texts into your hearts, and never go into your bed at night or leave your chamber in the morning before calling upon the God of your fathers to keep your hearts pure and your faith strong as a winged lion. Only so will you rise above all the mists and troubles that every day brings to erring man. Take your stand beside the Cross of Christ, and let no Jack o' Lantern light of reason tempt you to budge from it. Trust where you can't understand, and don't waste time praying to have the dark made light. Take the dark, like brave men take a dangerous road or sail out trusting into stormy seas. Pray for one thing—Faith—and all the rest will be added to you. I know it; I've proved it. Trust the laws of God to be just, and remember that we know less of His mysterious path than the fly drowning in my eye at this moment do know of me. Come here, Deb, and take the thing away."

With the corner of her handkerchief Ned's be-

trothed tended to Mr. Major's trouble; then he blew his nose, wiped his watering eye, and kissed her.

"I didn't ax you young creatures to come here to preach to you," he declared; "but Brokenshire and his views led up to it. We must all do what we can for that man, and strive to settle his mind to a braver and honester outlook."

"'Tis the subject of property he's doubtful about," said Ned.

"So be all that haven't any," answered Mr. Major. "You ask him if he'll give up the 'Night Hawk' to better the boatless men, and see what reason he's got to give for not doing so."

CHAPTER XIV

On a day when the marriage date was fixed and Deborah had gone to Newton with her mother to spend money, Ned Major made holiday, and wandered alone at the cliff edge full of happy dreams. The harvest was ripe for the sickle and promised well. He moved where glory of royal gold flashed brilliantly against the blue background of the sea. A breeze cooled the sunshine, and he heard the mingled song of wave below and wheat above. Turning his back on the fields presently, he sat on a stone high over the sea, stretched his idle limbs under the blaze, and dwelt in spirit on Deborah.

Then, fifty yards away, where he had been sleeping in a sun-bath among cushions of dead sea-pinks, a brown and ragged object moved, turned over, and stretched out hand to a battered hat and a tobacco-pipe.

It was Mr. Varwell, who spent many of his days in summer weather upon the limestone ledges of Berry Head. Now, moved by hunger, he awoke, girt his rags tighter about him and crept upwards to the yellow corn. Ned guessed his purpose, and remained silent and motionless until Dick, on hands and knees, with only his forlorn hat visible, wound into the field and began picking off the heads of the harvest; then, striving to make his voice harsh and gruff, the young man shouted roughly to him:

"Hi, you rascal there! Get out of that, or I'll send policeman after you!"

The hairy and crapulous countenance of Tumbledown Dick peeped cautiously out of its shining setting. He perceived Ned, grinned with evident relief, rose to his feet, and began shamelessly to pluck the ripe ears.

He gathered a heavy handful, then approached young Major, beamed cheerfully upon him, wished him well, and sat down beside him.

"In the very nick of time I find you," he said. "I've been sleeping ever since the sun rose out of the sea, and now my nature calls aloud for food and company. And here's both at my service, for I know you wouldn't hold a handful of corn from a hungry man."

"You're welcome, though poor fare."

"Not at all. A little corn, plucked out of the husk and warm all through with sunshine, is very good and pleasant food for a plain liver like me. But for the fruits of the earth I shouldn't be here now. If you understood Nature like what I do, you'd know that she never gives anything for nothing, Ned. That's where man have got the pull over her. He's larned to do it; but he can't teach her. Hard—hard she is. And so, as I take it out of Nature by drinking rather more than enough to quench thirst, I have to pay it back by eating poorly. My appetite for food is a mere shadow. However, let's talk about you. So you're in sight of the married state? Well, I wish you nothing but good. I know a lot about it, for naturally 'tis them outside that get the best view, and I've been much interested in the ways of married people—ever since my father kicked me out of doors at fifteen for trying to show him how to manage my mother."

Varwell rubbed corn in his hands and blew away the husks. He collected fifty grains and put them into his mouth.

"'Tis a glorious thing, Dick," declared the lover. "'Tis most too good to be true, for everything goes right with me and nought goes wrong. I'm growing feared of such terrible good luck. The future's as clear for me as the edge of the sea."

"And, like the edge of the sea, have got clouds under it. Don't you fancy that marriage is all beer and skittles, my fine chap. I'll grant that it works above the average well in Brixham; in fact our fish-

ermen get on pretty fair with their wives in about fifty per cent of cases. But why? Because they are away from them five days out of six! Now you landsmen can't do that. You've got to show yourselves all the time, till you're a weariness of the flesh to the women. They get properly bored to death with you and your parrot voices and parrot repetitions and parrot opinions; and, as for you, you come to know them that cruel well—to every dimple and mole and tone of voice and whim and fancy—that after a doubtful number of years you both cry out to your God for a little change of—air. I've seen it. 'Tis nothing to bleat about—'tis nature, and a thing of every day. And if 'tis a fault, then it must go against the Maker's score, like a tidy number of others."

"I don't believe a word of such stuff," said Ned stoutly. "'Tis the whole joy and glory and pride of my life—every minute—every minute of it: to know me and my girl are going to live together for evermore. Such a girl! Good Lord, Dick! you don't know what you're talking about. To get weary of the woman you love with your whole heart and soul! It's not to be thought upon."

"In your present state it is not. But a lot of very decent, orderly men, if they turned their hearts inside out, would show my pattern of thought stamped on 'em. No disrespect to a good wife, mind—not at all. Nought but the human craving for a little variety, and to get a wider experience of a very wonderful creature. 'Tis the women's fault. They'm the most interesting things God ever made, and the earth's full of 'em; yet a man's told by the parsons he must put all his human nature and thirst for information under his heel because 'tis naughty and—— However, this ban't the moment to tell you these things. And 'twould only be waste of time if I did. For you won't believe 'em these twenty years yet, I dare say."

"Marriages are made in heaven—that's true as Gospel," said the lover.

"'True as Gospel'? Yes—just about as true,"

admitted Tumbledown Dick. "Made—in heaven—eh? Well, then, 'tis wholesale, and quality not guaranteed. Still, you've got the genuine article—that I can't deny. A nice little girl as ever anybody need wish to see. Take her, and thank your luck; and long may you hoodwink each other into thinking this here is the best of all possible worlds. And see that your cup of fortune runs over—not to waste, but to good use. Think of the likes of me—a voice in the wilderness—and let it be your pride now and again to give me a shake-down and a full cup. We're all doing our proper work, and 'tis only a question which seed springs up quickest. I be sowing seed in the ears of the next generation; you be sowing seed in the earth. To every man his rightful toil."

Mr. Varwell chewed more corn.

"Oh, Dick, 'tis true enough that, if you've got more luck than you deserve, you long tremendous to make other people a bit luckier too. I wish—I wish, Dick, that I could make you luckier."

The tramp regarded him kindly.

"So do I," he said. "But don't you judge by your own thoughts or your own conscience of another person's comfort and ease. I dare say you fancy there's not a young fellow in Brixham as wouldn't change places with you this minute; and yet, if you could take a poll of 'em, you'd find there's not a boy in the place that would. We each know our lot, and though we're all yelping to change it, few sane folk would make a change blind. They'd want to learn a bit first. They'd want to take just one peep at t'other man's skeleton cupboard before they changed places. Life shows that envy be often terrible misplaced. And I envy no man anything but his liver. Give me a new liver, and I ax for nothing beyond that. But Nature gave me a very fine organ at the start, and now that I've ruined it, she's not interested in it no more. My life's running out like the tide; but it has suited my taste, and I'd do pretty much the same if I had to begin again to-morrow. We're

built in a pattern, and most men be contented with their own pattern, and some be delighted with it. There's not a sneaking cur or empty-headed ass in Brixham but ban't a bit of a hero in his own eyes. 'Tis only the real great men ban't happy about themselves. For my part, I've took my pinch of clay, and used it without thanks or cusses. It might have been a darned sight better; but, on the other hand, it might have been a darned sight worse. I've cracked it pretty bad; but it will hold together five or six more years, I dare say; and if, in that time, I can upset the silly ideas of a few well-meaning young fellows, like you, and make you see sense, and feel the sting of the world's injustice, and teach you what real truth and real liberty be like, then I shall peg out—on the sunshiny side of some haystack, or 'pon the moss of some lonely wood—very well satisfied with what life and liquor have done for me."

"'Tis all wild and wrong what you tell, Dick—so my father says. And how should I be better or wiser than him to give ear to you?"

"Escape from the tyranny of your father's opinions," said Mr. Varwell. "I'd sooner see a man tethered to his mother's apron-strings than his father's opinions. They'll harm him less. Let the last generation lie behind you, not be a blind wall stuck in front across your proper path. 'Tis flying in the face of evolution, Ned, to cleave to your father's opinions. He stands self-condemned by having opinions. The useful man be like me; he don't deal in opinions; he's got nought but ideas, and he wants nought but ideas. He goes about with his ears and his heart open for ideas. Opinions be the letter that kills, my son; and ideas be the spirit that quickens. All this is hid from you, because you ban't turned twenty yet, and you're also in love, which be a great breeder of hard and fast opinions; but you remember what I say, and don't let John Major—pious blade though he be—steer your ship for you. Strike out on your own account, and keep your own tiller in your own hand."

"If he has got a good model under his eyes, a man's a fool not to follow it, Dick."

"Not at all. You're a fool if you do—a fool and a slave in the bargain. We wasn't put into the world to imitate our fathers. Life ban't writing in a copy-book. Go your own way, and help to make history. Let them follow as can't lead; but try to lead, and give your brains up to the world's wisdom, not your father's. He don't know everything. I know a million times more than him. And I see a million times better what's coming: wonnerful things that will send your father's opinions down the wind like this chaff I fling on the air. I'll tell you one thing that you've heard a'ready; and 'tis a brave truth from my point of view. They laugh longest who laugh last, Ned. And them that I stand for—the outcasts and the scorned and the publicans and sinners and harlots—will laugh last. It may be a cruel long time yet afore we socialists get there; but when we once begin to laugh, 'twill be a smile that will outlast all the grinning of the past—a smile that will be copied by every living mouth. Then, three parts of humanity won't be laughing on the wrong side of its face, Ned—like it is now in this poor little, ill-mixed pill of a world."

The boy laughed.

"'Tis wonderful—amazing wonderful—to hear you run on, Richard Varwell. If you can say these fine speeches on a handful of corn, I'd like to hear what you'd rise to on turtle-soup and such things. Perhaps you'd change round then, and reckon property was the rightful sign of them that possess, and that class and all the rest of it was the work of evolution just as much as progress. You put me in mind of our cart-horse, 'Neptune.' When he's on hay, he'll plough; but give him corn and he won't plough for anybody. Must feed him low to take humble opinions; but with high feeding, he gets high notions. If us give him a few beans, he'd want to go hunting!"

"You confuse your own argument, Ned, and play

into my hand," answered Mr. Varwell. "Keep men on the food that God made for all men, and they bide rational and do man's proper work; but upset the balance and flout nature and stuff the lazy ones with chicken and champagne, and they lose their sense and cry out for nought but chicken and champagne for evermore, and don't care who the devil they trample on to get it. I tell you this, as one who's tasted both: there's no proper or innocent place in this world for chicken or champagne outside a hospital ward. In a well-regulated world, luxuries—— However, this be really too large a subject for a dry day."

"Other people's luxuries, Dick—not ours. Have a pipe of my tobacco?"

Richard instantly helped himself from Ned's pouch. It was made of green plush, and his initials had been worked on it in yellow silk by Deborah.

Tumbledown Dick smiled leniently at the toy.

"Time was when women's hands would do such things for me. And to return to the main argument, you thought it very clever to offer me baccy when I spoke of luxuries, Ned. But don't go wrong there, too. Tobacco's a necessity—not a luxury at all. After Queen Elizabeth's time and the Spanish Armada, and all that, the nerves of the British man began to get so cruel stretched and tormented that his Maker saw 'twas high time a soothing sedative came to the country. Now we couldn't do without it—any more than we could do without tea and coffee. So there's your argument blown up. And now I be going to pluck a few score more of these here wheat-heads, by your leave; and then I must go and see how my figures stand at the nearest house of refreshment. The great secret of successful and cheap drinking is to have a score running in a lot of different houses at once. Then, when figures get a bit steep in one place, you can give it a long rest till they begin to grow afeared you've forgot 'em altogether. But presently, when you beam among 'em again, with a shilling or so perhaps, they'm that

overjoyed to see you that drinking becomes a pleasure once more, instead of just a duty, as it too often is with men that don't understand it."

"These branches of larning don't interest me," declared Ned.

"Not yet; not yet. But all larning is useful. However, in view of your coming marriage, next time we meet we'll talk of women and nought else."

"I ban't sure if I want to hear you on that subject, Richard."

"Have no fear, Ned. I'm always on their side—so's Providence and religion and all the powers of the world, the flesh, and the devil. So long! I've been very interested listening to you. But leave go the opinions, like you'd mistrust a rotten bough when climbing a tree. Ideas be the firm things: they fly on strong wings."

He moved away, and behind him waves of light rippled over the cornfields, where they rolled to the pathway upon the cliffs. As a sudden flaw of wind upon the sea dims and ruffles it, so in the wheat, these breezes came and went and flashed upon the amber stems; while, as the water-waves, sweeping onwards, suffer the growths of the sea to become visible in a ruby ribbon or spring-green streamer, so here also flamed up lovely weeds as the harvest nodded and swayed and bent, then lifted its myriad heads again. Poppies and gipsy roses and corn-flowers lit the ripe-brown surfaces of the wheat-field. They sparkled with scarlet or lavender or deep sky-blue as Dick began to pluck again.

While he helped himself he sang, and young Major heard the words.

"Three things will be scratching—
I'll tell you if I can,
A cat, a brier, and a woman.
Though 'tis my delight both Night and Day
To praise the women as much as I may."

END OF BOOK II

BOOK III

CHAPTER I

THERE fell a rare and radiant night of January, with the full moon on high and a strange mildness of temperature knit into the purity of the winter air. The stars aloft and the stars in the village windows alike shone clear and steady, while delicate hazes made one of earth and the firmament above it. Neither did the sea know any boundaries. It melted to the sky and stole waveless upon the shore, as though unwilling to break by one least ripple the moon image mirrored there. A peace profound haunted cliff and crag, the farmlands above and the hamlet clustered beneath. But far away, under a flood of silver, floating there like a flock of sleeping birds, the trawlers lay becalmed. And aboard was impatience of this peace, and a hungry cry for the moon to set and the morning wind to waken.

John Major and William Gilberd watched on the 'Jack and Lydia,' while young Tom Honeywill and a new hand slept. Michelmore had left his old skipper, and was now possessor of a trawler.

"Speak quiet," said Mr. Major. "Very like Tom's awake, and I wouldn't add a grief to his young mind."

"He knows his mother ban't long for this world, however—in fact, 'twas him told me a month ago what you tell now. His father be a man that looks ahead, and he's made it all clear to Tom what will hap when Mrs. Honeywill goes. Your son, Ned, and his wife bide on, and Ned will be sub-tenant under Nicholas Honeywill for three year—till the lease is out. Then, if he pleases to renew on his own account, he can do so. But Mr. Honeywill will drop out then; he wants to get away from the sound of the sea."

"All true. Strange that any man can wish such a thing; but he's never been shamed of his opinions, rash and reckless though they are in many directions. There it stands then. And Ned's wrapped up in Berry Farm. I doubt he'll take it on and be master three years hence, if he can afford to do so."

"He's been married two year," said Mr. Gilberd.

"Yes, and he's saved just short of fifty pound, and he's got one child. That's pretty good for two years of work."

"I lay you was sorry the child didn't hap to be a boy?"

"No, no; us must have maids so well as men. My Lydia have got two boys to one girl; and no doubt Ned's next will be a boy, William."

"They'll none be to you like Johnny Brokenshire, however?"

"That's true. I won't deny it, because I cannot. He was the first of the new generation, and he'll always be the first in my eyes. So perfect as faulty human nature can be in my opinion. Titus Peach says that the second boy have a better disposition, but that's his bias. He's all for the second child—just because it's called Titus, and because it takes kindly to the tanning business and can be seen every working hour of the day messed up to its li'l eyes in red and yellow ochre. A good and pleasant child, but the moon to t'other's sun. Have 'e marked the way Johnny can drive a skiff through the harbour? The very daps of the way I done it fifty year agone! And there's not a boy in Brixham his age who can swim like him."

"His father taught him that."

Mr. Major sighed.

"That man! The most uneven spirit, William—the most uncertain creature that ever walked among us. One day, to hear him, you'd think there never was a wiser head on young shoulders; but the next, his sense be scattered to the winds. You don't know where to have him—that's the trouble. 'Tis

always some new thing, and his opinions touching the State be enough to set an honest man's teeth on edge."

"He's sick to death of the sea, and his boat's on offer to anybody that will buy it."

"I know—I know it is so. And I'm hopeful that none will offer, though, with all his faults, he keeps his boat so well as we keep our own. And a very good boat too."

"How often has he been up?"

"Four times," answered Samuel's father-in-law. "First time, as you may remember, he went to prison. Since then he's paid the fine; and last time he came afore them he was warned that next time he'd be put away without any option—for six months or more very likely."

"There'd be one good thing come of his selling the boat," declared Gilberd. "He couldn't go poaching in Start Bay, or anywhere else."

"Just what I said to myself a bit ago; and then I said it to Lydia. But she says 'tis in the blood of him. You can poach ashore as well as afloat, for that matter, and there's things more valuable than fish. But she hopes he'll bide to sea, and reckons he can do less harm there than on land. There's no other women there anyway."

"Your girl's too good a wife for the man."

"She is. She's got a lot to put up with, yet, from the husband point of view—apart from all the larger duties that go to make a good man—she don't quarrel with him. She says he's a faithful husband to her. I hope 'tis true, I'm sure. And if it is, then us must thank my daughter's cleverness, not the man's goodness. That I will say, though her father. Not many women would have held that light man. He's given over church again now; and when I taxed him with it, he said that change is the salt of religion, same as it is of life in general, and he must give heed to t'other side a bit—if only for fairness."

They talked long on the subject of the unstable Samuel, and a very wide tolerance marked their con-

clusions. Mr. Major believed that six months in prison might save Brokenshire; but Gilberd declared that such an experience was enough to turn any high-spirited man into a criminal.

"He don't understand that 'tis wrong to fish in Start Bay," said William. "And not all the law and order in the land can make him change his opinion."

"Then it must happen to him as to the other wrong-headed men in the like case. The strength of the land lies in its laws, and though we may not always hold with this turn or twist of things—as when they sentence a girl to death for killing her child and let the man go free that got it—yet, safety lies in numbers, and what the majority have settled is best for sartain. If it wasn't best, it wouldn't happen, and that's where faith comes in, William. So Start Bay is shut, and them who think 'twould be better open must bow to their betters who, always under divine Providence, have decided that it shall be shut."

The night deepened, and though it grew colder after set of moon, no hoped-for breeze came as herald of dawn. Anon the skipper and Gilberd were relieved by Tom Honeywill and the new hand. The latter was a loose-limbed, hearty young giant, called Paul Larkin, who claimed relationship with Mr. Larkin, the propagandist. These two watched oncoming day while the elder men slept; but light brought poor promise with it. A fitful easterly air rose and died on the sea in weak catspaws. Mist rolled up with it, and morning found pallid sunshine vainly struggling with great fog-banks out of which from time to time screeched frightened steamers feeling their way at half-speed up and down Channel. Not until after noon did the vapour thin and the wind rise. Then the fleet, now scattered over a ten-mile radius, trimmed sail and lowered trawls. It chanced that another boat came within reach of the 'Jack and Lydia' half an hour after she had dropped her net. The newcomer was not yet fishing, and so she overtook Mr. Major's boat.

"'Tis the 'Bread-winner,'" said Paul Larkin, "and she wants to hail us by the look of it."

Now John and his crew, together with most of the fleet, had been from shore two days at work over the 'Scruff' for sole, whiting, and plaice; but the 'Bread-winner' was only out of port on the preceding night. She carried the last intelligence from shore, and as it nearly concerned the boat now in sight, the skipper of the 'Bread-winner' went a little out of his way to tell it.

"Jan Major, ahoy!" he bawled presently. "We'm out o' Brixham last night, and there's bad news for 'e."

"Ax what it is," said John to young Larkin, and the man lifted his voice and roared over the water.

"What is it, then?"

The 'Bread-winner' sailed nearer, then put her helm up and flapped into the wind fifty yards away.

"I be sorry to tell you that a Government boat catched the 'Night Hawk' again two mornings agone. She've been down off the Islands fishing—so they said; but there was a lot of contraband found in her—'baccy, I believe. And they fear that we've said good-bye to Brokensheer for a month of Sundays!"

Gilberd scowled across the water at the man who had brought this news.

"Like you, you croaking raven, to go out o' the way to tell this," he shouted; "but I lay 'tis a lie all the same."

"'Twas Jan Major I be telling, not you," cried back the other. "And 'tis true enough—onless the *Daily Mercury's* a liar. And besides that, Mrs. Brokensheer had a telegram, and so have Saul Mutter's wife. They'm all in quod to Weymouth."

The 'Bread-winner' fell away, took the wind, and dropped her trawl. Thus, until night fell, Lydia's father was confronted with the bearer of the ill news steadily fishing beside him.

His first thought had been to return home imme-

diately, but he changed his mind. This blow was hardly unexpected. Not twelve hours before the advent of the news he had predicted to Gilberd that trouble was yet in store for his son-in-law. It had come quicklier and darklier than might have been foretold, and on second thoughts John Major was not sorry to find himself at sea in the moment of the catastrophe. Time now offered for thought, and he had leisure to mature his plans for Lydia and her children.

"I'm cruel afraid he'll get six months, if not twelve," declared William Gilberd. "I remember very well my wife's brother, who was a rip much in the pattern of Sam, and he done this very thing; and they catched him through his own foolishness in getting drunk afore he got ashore. And he had hard labour for his fun; but that was owing to complications. He showed fight, and so did the other free trader that was along with him. I hope they 'Night Hawk' chaps was too sensible to do anything like that."

"His sense wouldn't ballast a very big boat," answered Major. "I haven't got no time to spare on him for the minute. I'm thinking of his home and my daughter and her eldest."

"Have he saved money?"

"Yes, he has. How much I didn't feel I could ax. And now 'twill be broken into, I suppose. It looks to me as if——"

He broke off.

"But 'tis no use my making plans for my daughter," he added. "She'll have her own plans cut and dried against this trouble afore I see her again. One thing is certain: I shall offer for to take Jonny off her hands till his father's back."

"'Tis when his father's back that he's best out of the house, I reckon."

"You're right, William; but that won't be allowed. His father and me pull different ways over that boy; yet so far, thank the Lord in a prayerful spirit, I pull strongest."

Chance after all modified Mr. Major's plans. He had purposed fishing through another four-and-twenty hours before returning to shore; but before midnight, in the fair way under clear weather and with a steady wind, the 'Jack and Lydia' was suddenly spoken. A mighty mass of darkness loomed up out of the night and stopped a cable's length distant, churned waves seethed ghostly round the fishing boat, and an ocean-going steamer, bound down Channel, stood by and called to John Major to pick up her pilot. The trawlers are often asked at sudden notice to carry a pilot ashore; and this is what now happened. A man came aboard and the boat that brought him returned to the steamship. Then Mr. Major drew up his trawl and set sail for Plymouth, his nearest port. None grumbled at the event, for this act of marine courtesy was worth two pounds.

CHAPTER II

Samuel Brokenshire was sent to prison for six months, and his comrades, Trust and Mutter, received lesser sentences. The 'Night Hawk' was laid up, and darkness settled upon the dwelling in Overgang. Thereupon Titus Peach came forward and made a proposal that had long been in his heart. So expeditious was he, that Lydia's father had not seen his child before the undertaking was settled in every particular. The tanner, indeed, called upon Mrs. Brokenshire within an hour of her ill tidings. His scheme was not newborn. He had carried it with him for many weeks, yet hesitated to declare it. The disaster to his nephew gave him his opportunity, and he came before Lydia with a fixed determination to carry the point.

"Don't take on," he said. "'Tis no surprise to me; but I'm not a man to hit anybody when they are down; and, before I speak to you, I want you to understand that your husband is a very good nephy whatever he may be as a citizen. We must judge of folk as we find 'em; and if the law finds Samuel an enemy to it, then the law must shut him up and punish him; and if you find him a good husband, as I hope you have, then you must stick up for him through thick and thin, as becomes your duty; and if I've always found him a good boy to me, then in his hour of trouble I must come forward and stand up for him."

"You always knew Sam's big, generous heart," said Lydia.

Johnny was at school on the occasion of this meeting; but the boy Titus now held his mother's hand, and her infant daughter slept hard by, oblivious of disaster.

"His character I understand better than your

father does, if I may say so. 'Tis natural, for the same blood as mine flows in Samuel's veins. He's like us all, a patchwork of good and bad; but the good side's most outward in my dealings with him, and I shan't quickly forget how he worked in the tanyard when I was ill at the very top of the season last spring."

"He was glad to do it for you. He's very interested in the business."

"And what's more, he did the work in a way that only I myself could have bettered. You might have thought such a gnat-brained, dashing chap—one all for speed and risk and recklessness—would have scamped sail-tanning. But he done it like a master, and so my credit didn't suffer a hair with customers. And now 'tis my turn, and, in a word, I've come to take you out of this. 'Tis all planned to the last detail. Next week my old woman as looks after me is going into one of they almshouses. She's earned it, and the fag end of her life will be calm and cared for. But who's to look after me, Lydia?"

He paused, but she did not reply.

"In a word, you are! Yes; you and your children be all coming to 'Laburnum Villa'; and there's the grotto for them; and you'll take care of me and keep house for me against the time your husband come out."

"He'd never hear of it, uncle."

"Make no mistake as to that. Samuel will be only too pleased. 'Twill take a very great load of care off his shoulders while he's put away; and, when he comes home, you'll be so well and comfortably fixed up along with me that 'twill be beyond even a husband's power to drag you away any more. And what follows from that? Why, Samuel will have to come and bide with me too. I'm not ashamed of him; he can come if he will."

Lydia was too much astonished at this suggestion immediately to accept it. One fatal objection presented itself.

"The children," she said.

"Well, ban't I a wonder with them? And don't they dote upon me? Come here, Titus, and say if you'd like to live along with Uncle Peach and play in the grotto."

Titus signified that nothing would suit him better.

"He's my boy, and he ought to be there. And the dinky girl be so welcome as her mother; while as for Johnny, he's no trouble to nobody but the schoolmaster, though I do hear tell that he's a terror in class and not built to carry any lasting store of book learning. Why for not let his grandfather have him? 'Twould be such a joy to John Major that he'd even forgive your husband for making this trouble. Yes, he would; if he got Johnny under his roof, he'd say that Providence had worked it all, and that 'twas far and away the best thing that could have happened. Then, mark me, in his delight he'd pardon Samuel everything and be happy as a lark."

"Yes, he would," admitted Lydia.

"Mind you, I'm not saying I can't do with Johnny. Far from it. He's welcome as Titus; but I'm that crafty and far-seeing in some directions, that I'm bound to point out, if your father has the child, 'twill soften him a lot towards Brokenshire and make things easier all round when Sam comes out."

"I expect it would," she admitted.

"You'd see him every day if you liked. And I'm not to be named for righteousness beside your father, so Johnny would be brought up in a high and proper spirit to correct any light opinions he gathered from Samuel."

"You're to be named beside the best and kindest of men, Uncle Titus," she answered. "This is too great a thing you offer. I can very well go on living here."

"On your savings. Much sense in that. Now I must have a housekeeper and one as can cook and scour; so why not you? You're doing me a great favour by coming. 'Tis not I be offering anything

beyond the roof over your head—and—and—a little bit of a present now and again till your husband comes back to you."

She hesitated, but he persuaded her. Lydia had little love for Overgang, and felt no sentimental regrets at leaving it; yet her dignity was dear to her, and she sorrowed at losing her own home and the personal control that she had exercised therein. Then the practical side of the question faced her and left no room for doubt. She was not justified in spending a penny of Samuel's savings now.

"We take on this house by the month," she said. "I can come to you in February, if you can be ready then."

"Come to-morrow," he answered. "Come to-night! All's ready and more than ready. I'll have Johnson's van up over for your things—Monday, we'll say. By that time your father will be back off the sea."

"'Tis very like he'd have offered me just what you have, Uncle Titus."

"And don't I know it? And isn't that why I skipped up here at the first breath of the news? First come, first served. You've promised, Lyddy, and if you was to go to Mr. Major now, I'd not forgive you, and Sam would be the sufferer."

"I've promised," she replied; "and it isn't in the power of any words of mine to thank you enough for such a generous thing. I'm very, very grateful, and you'll find that out if my pair of hands can show it."

"'Tis an ill wind that blows nobody good," he answered; "and the wind that's blown Samuel into clink has blown you to my house. Out of evil comes good, say what you will, and I hope and trust your father will see the same."

"He will if I let Johnny go to him."

"He'll think he's dreaming."

"Samuel doesn't deserve to have such an uncle as you, and such a father-in-law as my father."

"Don't say that. Remember John Major's opinion:

that we get our deserts to a grain. And if Samuel have such a brave pair of old men to look after his family as me and Major, then he deserves to have 'em; and if he deserves to have 'em, he must be a much better and worthier young chap than people have fancied he was."

Upon this triumphant conclusion Ned Major appeared. He had heard the news during the dinner hour, and when Deborah read it, he broke off in the middle of the meal, took some bread and cheese in his hand to eat upon the way, and started instantly for his sister. He had already planned to help Lydia with her future; but before Mr. Peach's proposal Ned felt that he could say nothing. Samuel's uncle was reported to be very prosperous, and he had evidently determined upon this solution of the problem.

When Lydia's father returned home, therefore, he found the main problem solved. He came two nights later, as his daughter had foretold, and finding the home in Overgang already dismantled, he seemed in doubt as to his own action.

"'Tis the very thing I meant to do myself, Lyddy, and I don't deny that the thought of you and your childer under your father's roof seemed a likely thing and acceptable to God; but that spry old man has hopped in afore me. Still, a father——"

"I knew you'd offer this," she said; "I told him so. I didn't act without thinking, and you mustn't be hard on him either."

"Hard? No; I hope not. He's very quick to see his own interests, as we all are. A clever—even a cunning man in some things—to say it not unkindly. But after all, you had right of choice, Lydia, and you naturally lean towards Peach, because he's always been over-easy where Samuel was concerned. I dare say if he'd been harder when Samuel was a fatherless boy, and used his authority where he could, your husband would have kept in the ranks of law and religion to-day."

Lydia felt her bosom rise.

"He said he wouldn't cast a stone at a man when he was down. That's all Uncle Peach said."

"And more would I, or any other Christian. No, no; if you've lifted more prayers for Sam than I have, Lyddy, since I heard this sad news, then you've prayed a lot. Don't let me anger you, my love, for that's the last thing your father wishes for to do. It will happen right; it will be the turning-point. When he comes back and finds his home gone——"

"His home will never be gone while I'm alive to make it," answered she. "So soon as he's back, his home shall begin again, where and how he pleases. He shall never say he's had——"

She broke down, and her father comforted her. Then they entered upon a more placid argument. He was patient and full of plans. At last he asked cautiously after the two boys.

"I suppose he's got room for you all? 'Tis quite a mansion of a house—so my sister told me long ago, when she was on terms with him."

"Plenty of room. And he honestly likes children about the place."

"Queer that in an old bachelor. However, if he says so——"

"But he proposed one thing, and I suppose I ought to tell you, father. Johnny's to school now, and though he gives a deal of trouble there, none can say he's not a good boy at home. And Aunt Emma has taken to him a good deal of late."

"I should think she had, and every other sensible person. He's the talk of the quay."

"And Uncle Titus is a very sensible man where children are concerned."

"Don't go on about him!"

"But I must. It was his idea about Johnny."

"Look here," said the old man sternly; "I'm patient and I'm yielding, and none can say I carry matters with a high hand over my neighbours; but I've got my limits, like everything mortal, and where that child's concerned I won't hear Peach—not one

word will I hear. Johnny's father has a right to speak, though little enough sense does he utter on the subject, and I live in hopes to convert him to my view afore the accepted time comes; but Peach—no. He's got the second boy, and let him be thankful. He can plan as he pleases for your Titus, and a very nice li'l boy he is, and wonnerful like our Ned in my opinion. Born for the shore without a doubt. But Peach shall keep his hands and his ideas off Johnny, or he'll have to reckon with me—with me and Providence both; for if ever I was allowed to look far ahead and see what the Lord has planned for me of His own, 'tis in the matter of that beautiful king of a boy. So 'hands off him,' is what I say to your uncle, or any other man."

"I know how fond you are of him, and how fond he is of you; and so does Uncle Titus; and he thought that, till Samuel comes home, it might be a very fine thing for Johnny, if it was possible, to live with his grandfather. Mr. Peach always says there's nobody like you. He bade me ask you if you would like to have Johnny in your keeping for six months—well knowing that it might be the making of the child."

Mr. Major gasped, and his daughter's eyes twinkled with tears. Yet a ghost of laughter lurked in them too.

"Of course you rate uncle's judgment so low that you may not think this a very good thought. I'm not sure what I think either. But I had to tell you. I should be after Johnny every day, so Aunt Emma wouldn't have much trouble. He can clean himself now."

"'Twas Peach proposed that?" asked her father.

"Yes; he seemed very sure that it would work well."

"'Work well'! 'Twill work to a miracle; and you can tell Titus that he's a blessed man, for he's become the mouthpiece of Providence, if ever man did. He's higher and wiser than us all. He's a wonder of the world, Lydia! I've always known him for a strong

and steady Christian, but such wisdom as this! 'Tis an eye-opener to me. You was right to admire the man and love him. And you tell him from John Major that he's a burning light of sense, and that I'm shoulder to shoulder with him, and—and—where's the boy—where is he? Let me be after him! Let me tell him, Lydia; let mine be the voice to tell him he's coming to live along with me till his father's back again."

She sighed, and thought of her husband.

"It hardly seems fair to Sam," she said. "But you won't influence him, father—not while Samuel's away? 'Twouldn't be just."

"You're right," he declared. "I'll put righteousness afore him if I know how; but he shall hear no more than can be helped of the sea—not till Sam's back pulling the other way."

The happy old man trudged off to find Johnny, who was playing in the harbour. It had struck Mr. Major when he first learnt of his son-in-law's tribulation that six months was a severe punishment. At this moment, however, he did not think so. He acknowledged, not without shame, to his secret heart, that he could have wished the sentence twice as long.

CHAPTER III

Time brought about the things that Titus Peach and John Major desired; but it stood not still, and presently there happened further changes, and Mr. Peach was left happy, but Lydia's father suffered a great loss.

When Brokenshire came out of prison he found his wife settled at 'Laburnum Villa' and his uncle absolutely determined that she should never leave it again. To Brokenshire's independent spirit such a plan did not commend itself, but he was not dead to the main chance; and when Mr. Peach made the question a matter of finance, Samuel consented to stop.

"I can't do without her kindness, and I can't do without her cooking," confessed the tanner. "She has worked a great deal of difference to my life's comfort, as I well knew she would do, and I'm not going to let you take her away, Samuel. Why for should you? I'm your own uncle, and getting up in years. What more natural than that you and your wife should stay along with me?"

"People will say 'tis for what we can get that we come; and I'm not that sort," answered the fisherman.

"Then you ought to be," declared Titus; "for the sake of your wife and your growing family, you ought to be. There's lots of room for one and all, and I've become so used to the childers' noise that I should miss it something terrible now. Let it be a matter of business if not of convenience. If for your own peace you'd rather be away from me, then sell your peace and be content to take money value for it. You can see my last will and testament if you like."

"I know that's all right," answered his nephew;

"and so long as you look after my Titus and give him a chance in the world——"

"That and more—that and more. If the Lord don't send you sons, the devil will send you nephews —eh? Nephews and great-nephews; and I'm very well pleased with the childer, and ready for one or two more, for that matter. So let it be settled so."

"There's one thing, however," explained Samuel; "you'll have to put up with Johnny too; and he's as bad as they make 'em—the living daps of me at his age."

"What! Take him away from his grandfather!"

"Yes; I won't be ridden on rough-shod all round —just because the 'Night Hawk' ran foul of a damnation excise boat. Curse the sea and everything on it —that's what I say. And Johnny's not going to be fetched up in Major's notions—that I will swear whatever falls out."

"As to cursing the sea, I say nothing," answered Titus. "The less you go on the sea, the better you'll please me, because I hope it means the more time you'll spend in the barking yard. But don't quarrel over the boy. Your father-in-law's given his word to Lydia and to you—for I heard him—that he's not pressing the sea. He's only making the child straight and God-fearing. Besides that, when all's said, 'tis silly to think none of your boys will have seafaring in 'em. 'Tis bound to come out."

"All boys may like it; but what man does? I'm not going to have no child of mine apprenticed to that dog's life, and then, when he's grown to years of sense and sees the folly, turn round on me and ax why I let him throw away his time for cleverer men than himself to make fortunes out of fish. 'Tis all wrong, and a sin and shame. We get too little for the danger and pain of the work, and them that eat the fish pay a darned sight too high for it. But between us and them be full pockets, and 'twill ever be that way. You hear Tumbledown Dick tell about it, and show what barefaced robbery goes on. He shan't take no

hand in that business—Johnny shan't—and from his grandfather he's coming. So, if you can't do with him, we must all go."

Thus it came about that, to his bitter disappointment and Johnny's furious grief, the child left Mr. Major and returned to his parents. Samuel proved stubborn upon the point, and the growing boy and his father quarrelled, much to the misery of 'Laburnum Villa' and the grief of John Major and his sister.

But now life ran with fewer jolts. Samuel was at sea less than formerly, and the friction lessened when his eldest son was sent to a day school at Dartmouth, and boarded there with Emma Michelmore's spinster sister of that town. He returned home every Saturday, and went back again on Monday morning. The child yearned more and more for the sea, while his father remained obdurate and refused to give any hope to that ambition.

A year and more was passed, and Lydia had borne Samuel another son; then came the long-pending changes at Berry Farm, and the kinsfolk and friends of Nicholas Honeywill met together at the funeral of his wife. A dozen men, including the landlord, strolled back to 'The Sailor's Knot' after burial rites were ended and the mourners had returned home. Mr. Peach and his nephew appeared among them, while Mr. Memery and Mr. Tribble joined the company together, and Larkin was also there.

"Never seed so many black coats on a week-day," he declared. "'Tis a sure sign of the high fame of the woman; though the less said of the husband the better, for I've had it from a personal friend of the man's that he believes in nought."

None heeded Mr. Larkin.

"There's been no nature in the woman for years," said Mr. Munday, as he took off his black coat and began to pour out drink for the company. "She sank and sank until she drooped to nought. Her sense was the last thing to leave her. 'Tis a great

shock, though so long expected. Nicholas be all in a mizmaze, as anybody might have seen by the grave to-day."

"White as a dog's tooth the man was," declared James Tribble; "and when they flung the mould, he jumped as though it had been thrown in his face instead of on the lid."

"He's lucky, however, in having Ned up there," declared Brokenshire. "The chap's young, but——"

"Too young—too young," answered Tribble. "If Honeywill's got any sense, he won't do the thing he plans to do and go afore his lease runs out. How can a youth so meek and mild as Ned Major——?"

Mr. Memery's corncrake voice interrupted the other salesman.

"Don't you say that. Young Major's wise enough and strong enough to run a farm now."

Then a bundle of rags in the corner suddenly turned and spoke. Tumbledown Dick was sitting beside a fire with his back to the company, and none had noticed him. He seemed to have shrunk somewhat of late, and was grown feebler and less enterprising than of old. A chronic cough shook him; but his uneven mind still belonged to him, and when sober, he possessed his old power to anger or amuse any listener.

"You know just nothing at all of the man—any of you," he said. "Sam's the only one that's near right. But Ned Major and me be very understanding friends, and I'm better up in the chap than he is in himself. I've read his character and know what he is. He's no good in a world of crooked men; but if the world was full of honesty and straightness, then he might be up top. I was sitting along with Ned on the lew side of a linhay up to Berry Farm two weeks afore Mrs. Honeywill went out of it. The sun was shining, and the spangled fowls was pecking the pips out of a great mass of pomage turned out of the cider mill. I'd just had a drink from the vat, for there's no better medicine than half a pint of apple juice afore

'tis racked; and I was loading my pipe and thinking my thoughts when up comes Ned. 'She's going,' he said. 'So are we all,' I told him. Then we talked and he axed me if I thought he was a strong enough man to run Berry, and explained to me that 'twas pretty sure Nicholas would never stop there after his wife was gone, though farmer had always thought to do so before the thing really happened. 'He couldn't stand seeing the ghost of her round about the place,' explained Ned; and I understood. And it shows the greatness of man, for to say it without unkindness, the grey mare that's gone was the better hoss up over. But it seems Honeywill really can't stop no more. And when Ned axed me whether I thought he was man enough to reign there, I said 'twas too big a question to answer in a moment."

"He's meek as Moses," said Mr. Tribble, "and meekness be a virtue that's out of date now-a-days."

"'The meek shall inherit the earth, however,'" answered Titus Peach. "That comes from a Book that's not out of date anyway."

Larkin and Mr. Munday applauded, but Dicky Varwell bade them be silent.

"Let me talk and say my say afore I begin to bark. Well, I thought upon Ned's question, and gave it all the benefit of my brains, for I'm fond of the boy and he's been a good friend to me for a long time—and his wife too. And I've told 'em to stay, and promised 'em my help so long as I'm here to give it. Ned's learnt a deal from me, same as you all have; but he ban't too proud to admit it, like most of you be."

"You'm a looker-on at life, and if you hadn't learnt a bit about it, 'tis pity, Dick," said Samuel.

"I'd sooner play the game than watch it, for my part," said Larkin. "And after all's done, when it comes to saving your soul, you've got to play the game; for that's a game none can play for you."

"Wrong again on your own showing," answered the vagabond. "That's the game Christ plays for every

Christian; and so far as I can see, most of you be quite content to look on and let Him play it."

"Leave the Name off your drunken lips," answered Larkin fiercely, "and don't try to teach me, or any Christian man, on that subject. Who be you—an unbelieving dog that you are—to talk about the Lord? I wonder you don't——"

But Mr. Munday silenced Larkin, and the angry fisherman went out with threats that he would never return.

"You'm always on the side of the heathen," he said to the publican; "so I'll take my custom elsewhere, where I can speak my mind with the rest and not be shut up like a telescope the minute I stand up for the true faith."

"What can you do with such a man?" asked Dick. "And there's scores like him—never can mention holy things without losing their tempers and getting narrow-minded and mean."

"He's well-meaning, but not well-educated," said Mr. Peach; "and you might say the same of most of us. We mean well—none better than Ned Major. And for my part I'm with Samuel here: I think he'll make a safe master for a fair-sized farm."

"He's a lot more sensible than his father, anyway," declared Brokenshire. "He thinks a thing out; he don't talk about leaving a thing to Providence one minute and then do all he can to change the mind of Providence the next. Take my boy Johnny. If ever Providence and me was at one about anything, 'tis about keeping John off the sea; but how the mischief can you do aught with a grandfather obstinate as a pig to have his grandchild sail along with him? I've had to have a right down row at last, and now of course 'tis said that I'm interfering with the child's natural bent."

"Every boy has a natural bent to the sea," said Varwell. "'Tis common and catching as measles or whooping-cough. But it can be cured, and it did ought to be. Sam's right in theory and wrong in

practice. If I had a child as wanted to taste trawling, I'd let him. I'd drive him to it with a whip and set him under the hardest, cruellest man among you. I'd wear him to the bone and keep him at it night and day till I'd choked the complaint out of him. The boy would soon be on his knees to come ashore then."

The party drank and presently scattered. Brokenshire went out with Varwell, and Dicky repeated his advice; but the other was obdurate.

"My boy's going to be apprenticed to a shoemaker," he said. "Abraham Guzzwell's the man. What he don't know ban't worth knowing."

Dick nodded.

"I can't offer a word against him. And his chief cleverness is a still tongue. He's a man out of the common and he's got a memory like iron. He's built up his knowledge on books and on people. Everybody can trust Guzzwell."

"And many of the swells get their shooting boots from him. I've heard the gamekeepers say how they've listened at shooting parties, and Guzzwell's boots be the talk of the country side. He've got the lasts of some very big people, Dick."

"He have. And 'tis wonderful what the man reads into a foot. Talk about fortune-tellers and hands! Guzzwell can do more with a foot than half they swindlers who pretend to tell the palm. 'Tis the humblest that get the closest view of the highest in this world, Samuel; and Guzzwell would bear me out in that. If you want to know a bit of the inner truth touching the quality, ax their washerwoman, not their friends and flatterers. Rich men go to Guzzwell—for his sense as well as his shoe leather. I've not been above taking his opinion before now, though his boots are beyond my income."

Tumbledown Dick stopped suddenly and fell into a fit of coughing. He bent over a granite bollard on the quay, then sat down, with heaving chest and watering eyes, to rest and recover his breath.

"The advice you ought to take, and won't, is to

go in the hospital," said his friend. "You're not the man you were, and another winter loafing out of doors and turning out of hot pubs on wet nights will settle you."

"Not yet—not yet," answered the tramp. "I reckon there's a good two year left, if I'm reasonably careful of my carcase. When I go in hospital, 'twill be to stop, Sam. And I mean to take very particular care that my last illness shall be short and swift. A deathbed's rather a painful sort of a place, even to a wise man like me; and I shan't be on my own a day longer than I can help, I do assure you."

CHAPTER IV

The passion of love is a heritage of youth, while the sentiment of love remains for those who are young no more. To the one belongs the brief, ineffable glory of the lightning; the other is moonlight on the deep, still sea. And in some hearts passion flows into sentiment under withering age as surely as the torrent into the lake or the colours of the rainbow melt upon a mountain's bosom. Mr. Nicholas Honeywill was much surprised to find how deeply he felt his wife's death. It revived emotions that her actual presence had a little obscured; and looking backward through avenues of five-and-twenty years, the widower saw his loss clearly, and perceived how that he had underrated the significance of the dead's companionship. Sometimes, after acute differences of opinion and days of discomfort, he told his secret spirit that her release would be supportable to him; but when nature did release her, his life was changed and he found himself stricken and helpless. He lacked faith, and was not religious; but sentiment belonged to him, and sentiment now, feeding full upon the past, reduced him to a condition of misery, from which Deborah and her husband strove in vain to lift him.

His plans and projects for the future, that had all promised well in the past, now took upon them a tasteless flavour. The things he had arranged for his own autumnal days seemed good to him no longer. He missed his wife as he had never dreamed that he could miss her, and henceforth Berry Farm and his dwelling place and sleeping chamber, her chair and her favourite position by the kitchen window, were haunted for him for ever. He had thought to bide

very comfortably along with his daughter and Ned. The issue proved that a plan, satisfactory enough while his wife was alive, became violently impossible after her death.

He broached the subject to John Major, and the fisherman assured him that time would dim these sentimental torments, and that, as the days passed, from sorrow he would rise into quiet happiness, still to move where his wife had moved and still to see her in memory, a link with the blessed eternity that he might hope presently to share with her. But Nicholas Honeywill had no consolation in that kind. He endured much, and finally determined to change his plans and leave Berry Farm, in hope that the sorrowful images awakened there might fade from him among other scenes. His children strove with him, but they failed to shake his purpose, and, guessing that the distractions of change might do her father good, Deborah soon opposed him no more.

A house was found not far from 'Laburnum Villa'; for, while he was determined to leave his old home, Mr. Honeywill refused to put many miles between himself and his daughter. To Brixham he came; but he brought nothing with him that belonged to his past. Berry Farm was left unchanged to Ned and his wife; while Tom Honeywill, who still sailed with the 'Jack and Lydia,' shared his father's new dwelling.

The change made no impression on Nicholas at first, yet with lapse of months he grew more cheerful; and a circumstance that added not a little to his improved peace of mind was a friendship that sprang up between him and Titus Peach. The humility of Titus and his simple rule of life attracted the farmer. He enjoyed the company of Mr. Peach, and spent no little time on summer days smoking his pipe in the grotto of 'Laburnum Villa.' Hither also came Deborah often with her little daughter; and as John Major derived an impetus to life from his eldest grandson, so now, Nicholas Honeywill found in that tiny

reproduction of Deborah she had borne to Ned a growing delight.

Lydia and Deborah had ever been good friends, and there grew at this stage of their stories a union very close between them. To the stronger woman her small sister-in-law seemed almost a pathetic object in her innocent joy and trust. Ned was Deborah's life; it seemed that her being was merged in his, and that her existence held no purpose apart from him. She drooped like a thirsty flower when he was away from her; she woke to the fulness of her small life and the highest brightness of her humble mind when he was by. Her trust and faith and pride in Ned were absolute. He was sun and moon and stars to her. He guided her going always; she did not think for herself at all.

Mentally she seemed an echo of her husband to most people—that and no more. His thoughts were on her lips; his ideas acutated her conversation; his opinions guided her in every act of conduct. Ned deplored his father-in-law's vague views, and so did Deborah; Ned wished that his girl had been a boy, and so did Deborah. Lydia, who found herself so often at wide variance with her husband, once felt almost sorry for Ned's wife. She had suspected that difference of opinion and active clash of convictions were seemly and wholesome in wedded life; she had held that they kept the home sweet; she had guessed that a stagnancy and deadness might be born of the ingenuous unity subsisting between Deborah and her husband. But time now made Lydia envy the younger wife. She, in her relations with Samuel, might rise to higher ecstasies than Deborah could feel, when her husband showed signs of improvement and set about the business of living in a worthier spirit; but, against that, Lydia knew well that she had suffered as Deborah would never be called upon to suffer; that she endured suspicions, fears, and jealousies that Ned's wife could never know.

The Brokenshires were reaching that crucial time

in married life when the link has been forged for ten years; and Lydia had heard women say that if the fetters threaten to begin galling then, husband or wife must prepare to suffer. She was anxious as she had never been anxious until now; she began to feel an unfamiliar anger making her forehead burn when Samuel stayed long from home. She caught herself thinking mean thoughts concerning him; and once or twice she did a mean thing.

She steeled herself to unlock one of his private drawers on a certain occasion. But it was empty, and the suffering she endured was other than she expected; for her own act stung her, no act of his. Her pride tormented her often; and while she grew daily less happy, all men united in praising her husband and proclaiming his complete reformation. Titus Peach, his own uncle, voiced the general opinion. But Lydia perceived that men may continue to admire a man though his wife has long since ceased from so doing. She strove to be honest and fair; she looked upon the bright side of him; but things were happening that began to poison her life. She could confide in none; and she hesitated to fall out with her husband. Samuel's fourth child would soon be born, and, as the hour of its advent approached, he became more solicitous for her welfare, and gladly obeyed her behests. He spent most of his time ashore now, and there was a whisper in Brixham that Mr. Peach designed to take his nephew into partnership.

With Nicholas Honeywill's departure from Berry, life began in earnest for Ned. He lifted the burden, yet not without some dread of such responsibility. For many weeks he was never without the purlieus of the farm. Even on Sundays he would not go away, and those who desired to see him came to his home to do so. Deborah watched over him and her father too. The folk said that her blue sunbonnet was never still, and that she knew the secret of being in two places at once. But Ned saw most of her;

she and the baby usually found their way to him at midday.

The roots failed, owing to prolonged summer droughts, during the year that followed Mr. Honeywill's retirement; and Ned began farmer with some very special difficulties in an unfavourable season that eclipsed profit with loss.

Thus it happened that every member of the family of Major had tribulation mingled in their cup; and each, only knowing the extent of their own cares, felt disposed to envy the larger apparent happiness of the others. The father, indeed, coveted none's prosperity, and rejoiced to see Ned's achievements and Lydia's prospects; but himself he mourned not a little to think that Johnny, designed in every sturdy limb for the sea, must now hide his grand virtue of courage and his rare possession of uncommon physical strength within the shop of Abraham Guzzwell.

Upon the day that Johnny was destined to take his first lesson in the uses of awl and leather, John Major sailed with many a sigh. He held it a cruel and improper circumstance thus to turn in the face of those natural instincts that Providence had implanted in his grandson.

"The end, of course, will be the same," he said to Mr. Gilberd. "We may oppose our puny wills to the purpose of our Maker, and, for a moment, we may fondly guess that we be going to have our way; but it never happens. Right is done, and right will be done for Johnny. I may not live to see him a fisherman, though fain I would do; but to that he'll come, as sure as did both his grandfathers afore him. 'Tis in the Books, and I can read it there so clear as though the angel was allowed to ope 'em under the spectacles on my nose."

"'Tis the sea that's made the land, after all," confessed William. "I don't say I feel to it what you feel, because I do not; but 'tis a fact that without sailors and adventurers, and them as have felt the cry of the ocean and answered it and gone forth in

the name of man's curiosity—without such the world would have stood still and the heathen would never have had the light."

"Very well said, William. 'Tis the first life and the best life. Else why did Jesus Christ go to the sea for His mates and to the fishers for His disciples? He knowed, none better, what the sea does for the human creature. And when a boy have the very call of the sea in his blood, when he pretty well spits Stockholm tar, as you might say, and knows more of the workings of wind and weather than many a grown man; when he's handier with the rope than anything, and loves foul weather better than fine, I say 'tis a flouting of common sense and reason to coop his curly head under a roof and put a cobbler's awl in his hand and make him learn to build boots instead of wear 'em."

"I lay he fought against it," said Tom Honeywill, who was now full fledged, and sailed as second hand of the 'Jack and Lydia.'

"He fought and he fought, and I don't say he've done fighting," answered Mr. Major. "He's a fisherman at heart, and after he's spoiled a bit of good leather and showed Guzzwell the manner of child he happens to be, I'm hopeful that shoemaker will make my son-in-law see more sense than I can."

As he spoke the trawler's boy, a stout youth of fourteen, suddenly climbed out of the forecastle.

His freckled face had turned very pale and his brown eyes were full of terror. His knees shook beneath him and his mouth hung open.

Honeywill ran forward and steadied him.

"Good powers, Frank! What's the matter?" he asked.

Frank's teeth chattered. He clutched Tom Honeywill's arm and looked behind him.

"There's something alive forward!" he said at last. "There's some gert monstrous thing stowed away under the sails!"

"A rat, I warrant."

"A rat ban't big enough to heave up a sail. 'Tis so big as a bear, and I heard un grunting."

The 'Jack and Lydia' was now standing off Plymouth on her way 'round land.' The North Channel happened to be fishing well again after two barren years, and John Major was among the first of Brixham men to avail himself of the news.

A moment later, before Tom could reach the forecastle ladder, the mystery of the unknown passenger was solved. A small, filthy-faced boy, with yellow curly hair and blue eyes, climbed on deck, rose to his feet and came aft. He panted defiance, and, before he spoke, cast his eyes ashore that he might learn how much green water rolled between him and the hated land.

"Johnny!" cried Mr. Major, "Johnny Brokenshire! What does this mean?"

"Lord! The sinful imp! A stowaway on his own gran'father's boat! Whoever heard the like?" cried William Gilberd, from the tiller.

Johnny preserved a courageous manner and stated the situation from his standpoint.

"I made it up to come more'n a month ago, when my father said as old Abe Guzzwell was to get hold on me. I didn't tell nobody; and last night, an hour afore you was going to sail, I rowed out with Mr. Coombes—him as hates father. And afore he went off in the 'Brown Mouse,' he put me aboard the 'Jack 'n' Lyddy,' an' told me to lie doggo for'ard till us was well away. And I shouldn't have come out for a good bit yet, but I was groaning wi' hunger, and Frank heard me. An' God's my judge I won't go for a shoemaker! So now then!"

Tom Honeywill was eating. He broke a pasty in two and gave Johnny the larger portion.

"Three cheers for you, John! I'm with you, and I'd have done the same," he said.

Then Mr. Major spoke, and his words struck chill upon his grandson's ear.

"Honour your father that your days may be long

in the land, John Brokenshire. Don't think that 'tis any joy to me to see you here; and your father mad, and your mother breaking her heart for fear. You'm a bad, bad boy."

Then he turned to Gilberd.

"Us'll run into Plymouth this instant moment," he said.

The sullen Johnny was sent forward while William and the child's grandfather held earnest speech. Then the trawler, with a fair wind, foamed under the Mewstone and soon cast anchor off the Barbican.

But the time, though short, had sufficed to modify Mr. Major's plans. A new hope suddenly dawned in his sanguine heart.

The skipper went ashore presently, and sent a telegram to his daughter's husband. He explained that Johhny had hidden by night in the 'Jack and Lydia.' He offered to bring him home, and gave Samuel an hour to decide whether Johnny should return or set sail again.

It happened that on the morning of his boy's disappearance, Samuel had a lengthy conversation with Mr. Guzzwell while he waited to hear news of the runaway. Brokenshire was not anxious. He knew Johnny's rare power of self-preservation, and he doubted not that the boy had taken law into his own hands and would presently be caught and sent home. But that he was at sea he did not guess until the shoemaker himself prophesied the truth.

"He's gone with the boats," said Mr. Guzzwell. "I'd lay the price of a pair of my best uppers to a brad that he's afloat. And, if you're a wise man, you'll let him stop there. I called him in the shop a week agone, and he told me, quite civil, that he'd never be any use to me or any shore-going tradesman. And he meant it all. Let him try. Call home your own green youth. What pair of horses could ever have dragged you out of your father's boat when you was big enough to go in it?"

"He's useless yet—only ten year old."

"Let his grandfather judge of that."

They were still arguing when Lydia hastened from home with John Major's telegram; and, in less than an hour later, Johnny's grandfather received a reply.

"*Let him stop and be damned. S.B.*"

With beating heart and eagerness almost tremulous Mr. Major took his grandson to a slop shop and made a hasty choice of garments.

When darkness came the Eddystone was flashing its far-flung beam upon Johnny's eyes. He felt a very great and a very successful man; but during the night, in a short, choppy sea, the runaway fell exceeding sick—a circumstance that cast some gloom upon his triumph.

CHAPTER V

The adventures of Johnny Brokenshire in the North Channel—the things that he saw and the things that he learned—came duly to his mother's ears when, after a fairly successful month at sea, the 'Jack and Lydia' returned to her port. But Johnny's father took a strong line, and to his wife's sorrow and Mr. Major's satisfaction refused to have anything more to do with his eldest son. Samuel did not bargain without his host, and a measure of his anger was doubtless affected; but it answered the purpose: John Major solemnly undertook the career of Johnny, and received him into his house from that day forward. The boy was still too young to go to sea, and his grandfather decreed that two full years must elapse before he could take his place in the 'Jack and Lydia.' Therefore Johnny, much to his regret, was sent back to school and kept strictly to his books.

"In two years," said Samuel, "he may have gathered enough sense to refuse fishing when the time comes." But John Major feared no such thing. Johnny was inoculated with a month on deep water; he would never turn back now.

He lived with the Majors, and was brought up on his grandfather's pattern. Him the boy loved well, trusted, and exalted into a great hero. The steady strain of Mr. Major's fixed opinions and masterful belief in Providence bore fruit even upon a heart so young. Samuel doubted when his wife gave details of Johnny's goodness; but all responsibility had been shifted from his shoulders, and he felt well content to let his boy develop under conditions so admirable.

Mrs. Michelmore was fond of Johnny, but while

not secretly averse from his permanent return, yet openly declared that this was an added anxiety and another cross.

"The straw will come which will break the camel's back," she assured her brother; "and this may very likely be the one. If I sink under this boisterous young creature, you needn't mind. I shall do my duty to him and to you as long as I'm spared. But how you can think that you are doing yours by taking him from his lawful guardian and beginning the business of being a father all over again, I suppose you know; I don't pretend to know. He shall find a pious and a Christian great-aunt in me, of course. And if I can steady his over-hopeful, cock-sure character it shall be done."

"'Tis better he should cheer you up than you should cast him down," answered her brother. "'Tis a great responsibility to have a young thing on your hands; but to me 'tis also a great joy and delight. You can't grow old while you've got a bit of youth like him in the house. You can't be for ever looking on the dark side while such a bit of live hope harbours with you."

"'Tis very well; but if you don't look after the shadows, they'll soon mar the sunshine," declared Mrs. Michelmore. "You don't see no faults in him, and 'tis ever my thankless task to point 'em out."

"The faults of youth—the faults you expect with the higher virtues. I want to have faults of a sort in a decent boy. I'd rather he fought than not, and I'd rather he played truant now and again than not. And other things, too small to call faults in my opinion. But he's honest and straight, and he's generous, and shares with his school-mates; and though dull at his books, he's amazing rich in brain power for practical purposes, and he can argue in a way that much amazes me."

"You didn't ought to let him argue. Who ever heard of a young boy arguing?"

"You'll find one in the New Testament," answered

Mr. Major. "Given the intellects, 'tis our duty to lift 'em up and enlarge 'em. And that's what I do with Johnny. He's larning something wonderful in all branches. I want to bring out the Major in him and baffle the Brokenshire, and that's what I'm doing; because the Major blood is sound, but there's a streak in the Brokenshire blood that we all know must be kept under if he's to be a successful man in the eyes of his Maker."

"Brokenshire's successful enough," she answered. "He've crawled up the sleeve of that weak-willed tanner, and without a doubt the barking yard will go to him when Titus passes away."

"Why not? He's Peach's first heir. For my part I shan't be sorry to see Samuel come ashore for good and all. He does less and less afloat, and once he gives it up, the temptation to come by money dishonestly may leave him. He's not drinking, and he's going straight at present."

Mrs. Michelmore sniffed.

"Is he? I think he's only going straight in one direction, because it makes it all the easier for him to go crooked in another," she said. "What he's after just now belongs to the shore, not the sea. I don't keep my ears open for bad news; but all the same I'm not deaf. One can't help hearing the rumours, and one can't help seeing the trouble, where 'tis plain for any understanding creature to see—on your daughter's face."

Thus the cares of Lydia first came to Mr. Major's ear after his grandson had, for six months, been living with him. But more Mrs. Michelmore refused to say. She left her brother concerned and suspicious; yet when John saw Lydia, asked her to put her trust and confidence in him, and told her frankly that her aunt believed her unhappy, she declared that it was not so, and assured her father that she had nothing to confide.

"Men are men, not angels," she said. "I haven't been well educated for nothing, and I'm not going to

take narrow views, though it may be very surprising to see a wife and a mother take broad ones. Sam's a good husband, and I have his money; and the children are being brought up as well as we can afford. Tell Aunt Emma not to listen so much to silly gossip; and if you want to know what a good man thinks of Samuel, ask Uncle Titus. We all live here together, and if each one of us have a little trouble here and there—well, as you say so often, this is earth, not heaven, and if earth was heaven, none would want to set their hopes any higher."

Mr. Peach came in at this moment, and Lydia referred to him.

"Here's father come for Samuel's character," she said. "And I've told him that I'm prejudiced in my husband's favour, perhaps, but that you can give him the truth."

"I can—I can," answered Titus. "And the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, I can relate. In a word, Samuel has come to his own character at last, and, as a bit of a student of human nature, I've proved that 'tis a case where the sea was a bad companion for a man, and led him into mischief. You shake your head, Major, but I'm right for once in a way. The sea may drive the fear of God into some natures, and I don't deny it; but for some there's no place like the shore, and a character that's flighty with the sea dancing under it, will settle down on the solid earth and become a credit to his friends and neighbours. Samuel was faulty in the past—nobody would admit it quicker than him; but that was only because he hadn't found his proper calling. He was on the wrong road—just like Ned was, only he didn't see so quick as Ned. But now 'tis clear as light that my nephew was born to be a sail-tanner; and though he've come into the profession late in life, as you might say, still 'tis in him; and I believe he'll make inventions and be known widely in the sail-tanning world afore any of us are much older. Where is he now, for instance?"

"Gadding about in London, they tell me," said Mr. Major.

"Not at all," answered the trustful Titus. "In London he certainly is; but why? Not to gad about, I do assure you. He's looking into the way they dress the sails of the Thames barges, and I'll lay my life he'll pick up some useful crumbs of learning—all on my account. You can't deny of Samuel that he's thorough, and when he wants to know about a thing, he leaves no stone unturned to come at it. Why, such is his zeal on my account, that he's away from home as often, if not oftener, than a fisherman—isn't he, Lyddy?"

"He's away a great deal now," she admitted.

"Here, there, and everywhere," continued Titus. "Busy as a bird bringing food to its young. And already we be taking up with new ideas at the works —me and Samuel."

"Very large-minded in you," said Mr. Major, "for men at our age find it hard to do with new-fangled notions. And, be it as 'twill, your own way of tanning won't be beat in a minute, and I hope you won't allow Samuel or any other man to meddle with it."

"Have no fear. He knows what my system be worth."

Lydia had left her father and uncle together, and Mr. Major took the opportunity to ask a further question.

"My sister was hinting, as she often do, that she'd heard Sam was a little neglectful of his wife, and didn't pay her all the attention she ought to have. They live along with you, Titus, so perhaps you'll tell me if 'tis so."

"No, most certainly not," declared Mr. Peach stoutly. "I speak as a bachelor, and know nought of the married state and its secrets," he added; "but I can say this: that my nephew's a loving husband and a most affectionate father. Lydia has the best his purse can bring; and he's frank and open and cheerful, and, in fact, a very reasonable, proper man

since he's come ashore. And though you've got his firstborn, don't you think he isn't keen as a hawk about the child. He often inquires at the school how he's getting on, and he often, unseen, has a peep of him; and Lydia has to tell him everything about the boy from week to week. Not that your Johnny's a patch on my Titus, as I've always said. Why, Titus have passed John in book-larning a'ready, and he've a head for figures that's far beyond his father's!"

"He gets it from Lyddy," answered the fisherman. "She has a touch with 'rithmetic unknown in my family, but common in her mother's. I'm very glad it have come down to your Titus, for 'twould have been a pity for such a useful art to drop out of the race."

The chat did not terminate immediately, but Mr. Peach, from his own somewhat sexless standpoint, quite reassured Sam's father-in-law. He applauded Samuel's energies, and did not dream that his motives were double, or that private need for more money was possibly responsible for increased activity in making it.

Another topic rose before the old men parted, and the owner of 'Laburnum Villa' spoke of his new neighbour, Nicholas Honeywill.

"'Tis strange how we be all wrapped up together—your family and mine," he declared. "For, since farmer left Berry Head and came down beside me, I've seen a deal of his daughter and your son. And their child have took to the grotto something wonderful—just like all children do. In fact, if a child didn't like my grotto, I should guess there was something wrong with its nature. And Honeywill himself ban't above smoking a pipe in it of a Sunday afternoon."

"I hope you say the word in season, Titus, and try and get him into a properer view of religion."

"No," answered the other; "I haven't your cleverness in that direction. Honeywill be fixed in his opinions, and, what's more, there's something you can say for them."

Mr. Major was perturbed.

"If you can't shake him, for God's sake don't let him shake you," he said. "See what his views do for a man in sorrow. Look how his wife's death wrecked him. Whereas, if he'd known what it all meant—as I did when mine went on before—he'd have——"

"Make no mistake," interrupted Mr. Peach. "The man's going on very well, and he's a deal more cheerful also. So much have he improved and steadied down, that Ned tells me he talks of actually going up to Berry Farm and spending a day or two there presently."

"You astonish me, for he vowed, not two months ago, as nothing would ever drag him there no more. 'I should see her at every turn—I should fancy I heard her voice calling from every corner.' That was his word to me, Titus. And he meant it, for tears falled down his whiskers as he spoke."

"Time works wonders, and the merciful God who invented time meant it to do so," answered Peach. "No doubt Honeywill felt like that a bit ago, and the spirit often returns yet; and sometimes, if we'm sitting late, as our manner is, and the fire burns low, and he'd had his second tot—which always does away the good of the first—he'll sink back and take the dark view. But, speaking generally, when the rheumatism holds off him and the weather's fair and Ned's news is good, Honeywill takes brighter views. He's fatter since his wife died, and though he seems to hold 'tis treason to her in a measure, that he should be so, yet he can't deny it. And fat means an easy spirit, when all's said."

But though the widower had in truth promised to visit Ned at Berry Farm and even stop some days with his own, the actual event was put off from month to month until another half-year had slipped by. Then, yielding to the importunities of Deborah, Mr. Honeywill nerved himself for what was destined to be no small ordeal, and returned to his old home.

He purposed staying for a week, if his sentiments rendered it possible, and he little guessed the plot which Ned and his wife had hatched in secret. Their urgent hope and ambition was to bring the old man back again to Berry; and they trusted that renewed experience of the ancient life and its comforts and familiar happenings, might achieve a change in Nicholas Honeywill and tempt him to return. They believed that the vision of his wife had dimmed for him, and that now, after more than a year was spent, it might be possible for him to live again amid the scenes where her days had passed.

He came, and found the sharpest pinch at first. The young people had more love than tact, and the things that hurt Mr. Honeywill they could neither feel nor guess. A thousand strands bound him to the inanimate objects round about him; a thousand heartstrings vibrated to the spectacle of this familiar environment. To them a chair or a table was no more than the thing that it appeared; to them a picture or a china ornament said nothing more than it said to any other beholder; but to the man these household trifles dated back full often to a time before his children were born: they wakened memories, some gracious, some beautiful, all sad from his present standpoint.

Despite his rational survey of life, despite the fact that his wife had never filled his days or made the joy of them, now he mourned her, and believed that his grief was largely remorse. He accused himself of having valued her too little; he judged himself very hardly; his discomfort was too acute to be endured.

The old man, indeed, erred in his estimates, and attributed to his wife's death much of the misery of this return home that belonged rightly to other causes. He missed her indeed, but he missed more the atmosphere which she had created and which had now vanished forever from the home of youth.

Deborah and Ned strove to hearten him; and while unconsciously they hurt also, yet the balance was to

the good. In process of time Nicholas began to be accustomed to the new order and less often to regret the old. With admirable intentions Deborah had hidden away numberless memorials of her mother, but Mr. Honeywill seemed to retain each one of them in his memory, and desired them again in their familiar places. Thus, little by little, he brought back the old conditions and set things as they were wont to stand. His selfishness hid from him the fact that by so doing he altered the arrangements that seemed good to Ned and Deborah; but they grudged no rehabilitation, for each seemed to promise that the old man was becoming reconciled to his return.

Now, some pang or discomfort prompted Nicholas to depart; and now, some agreeable incident tempted him to stay. Deborah never wearied of pressing her father to leave them no more, and Ned, too, was very anxious that he should remain.

Mr. Honeywill hesitated long, and finally determined to come back.

CHAPTER VI

Now upon the secure hour and happy life of Ned Major there dawned an evil day. Mr. Honeywill settled into some twilit happiness again as the months passed at Berry Farm. He revived old ways, and Deborah, albeit she thought the new ones best, had no heart to raise any question. Among other customs that his father-in-law begged Ned to retain was the old fashion of gleaning, and the young man, without a rueful thought, consented. Thus it happened that in early September there came to the great cornfield on Berry Head a little crowd of the humblest folk, and Nicholas Honeywill, looking back through an avenue of fifty years, remembered his younger days and dwelt again among them.

He came down to the cornfields himself, and chatted with ancient women who were there to carry the wheat that their grandchildren gleaned.

The yellow fields glittered with stubble spread under a bright sky, and, above, masses of broken cloud flew, like wild birds, before a furious wind. The sun was in Libra once more, and a forerunner of autumnal storms had already struck land and sea. To-day a man could not look into the eye of the wind, a woman could barely stand against it; but the children enjoyed such a rough salutation. They shouted to each other over the sheared cornfields, and their little shapes were bent everywhere as they gathered the last of the harvest. Some elder maidens also worked among them, and others, making pleasure of it, talked with their companions and gleaned not very diligently. Here and there a lonely figure toiled in earnest for his gift of bread, and gathered a stout sheaf before evening fell.

The wind made the cliff-edge dangerous, and anxious mothers kept an eye upon their venturesome little ones. But children have a magical way of vanishing from the fondest eye; and a child it was that vanished now.

Low walls ran to the west of Berry Farm cornfields, and under one of them several persons were collected to shelter from the riot of the wind. The footpath along this cliff traversed this wall by a rift therein, and beyond was a strange place called the 'Cup,' where the little track ran above a deep and hollow depression on the cliff. This slope met the wind and shone, for it was silver-bright just now with countless calyces of the knapweed. They sparkled under the sunshine and made brilliant the sides of the hollow. On this steep there throve also little autumn squills and the rare splendour of goldilocks. The place was purple and gold with these flowers, and, as a blossom will tempt insects to their death with insidious splendours that lead to a heart from which there is no return, so now this treacherous and beautiful slope, slippery to the foot under its dead grasses and scoured by sudden fierce gusts of the wind, offered dire peril to any small adventurer who might descend upon it. The sides of the Cup were very steep. They broke off abruptly at a precipice fifty feet high, and beneath them deep water ran when the tide was up, while many rocks were revealed at the ebb. To the left of the aperture ascended crags fringed with samphire and great tree mallows; to the right, abruptly fell another cliff to the sea. A little bay subtended this spot, and to-day, the furious wind and dazzling, storm-broken sunshine, weaving together upon its face, fretted strange and beautiful patterns over it. Like some silken fabric of blue all fire-shotten, the bay rolled to the cliffs, and there the heavy water leapt in volume, thundered among old caverns, and spouted aloft to deck the ledges with feathers of foam. These ascended until sunshine set a thousand jewels glitter-

ing upon their crests, and then they sank tumultuous down upon the turmoil beneath.

The sea, in a great white-capped welter of running billows, fled before the wind, and only a close-reefed sailing ship or two rolled up Channel. Wide shadows of purple raced over the green-silver waters; here and there sped solitary squalls that tore the heads off the waves, lashed up their hollows, and then, in grey clouds of rain, hid the whole seething whirl that they had created. Such storms passed swiftly and the sky cleared again behind them.

Beneath the Cup an old man worked in a boat under the cliffs. He was dragging up crab-pots and running some risk of getting swamped. The rocks overhung above him, and crying gulls circled about them or swooped in great curves round the boat. The wind treated them roughly, and rising from time to time, their grey breasts caught the shock of it and they slid away along its planes and turned half over in air and shot aloft, then fought up against it again, or cheated it by sinking into the partial shelter of the bay.

Deborah Major, her husband and her child, came down after noon to watch the gleaners. Ned gazed somewhat doubtfully at the generous masses of corn he had sacrificed to Mr. Honeywill's tradition; his wife fell into speech with a neighbour, and for the space of half a minute she loosed the hand of her little girl, a baby nearly three years old at this time.

The ancient gammer now interested Ned's wife with pictures from the past. Deborah laughed once, then restrained her face to sadness while the speaker told of sorrow.

Death's dark hand already lifted over the young woman and the old one; but it was the girl that he had come to gather. Deborah missed her baby, and turned round just in time to see the child pass through the wall and trot round to the other side, where the pathway skirted the flowery slope beyond. She called to Ned, but he was too far off to reach his

little one as quickly as Deborah herself might do so. Therefore she started to run, and presently stood on the rim of the Cup. Her child was already halfway down it. The small thing looked up and laughed. She was deliberately rolling over and over among the flowers—for delight of rolling, as children love to do.

The mother shrieked, and the husband heard and came running; but he was too late, and all that he saw, when he hastened into the Cup, was Deborah's sunbonnet, like a blue butterfly caught and fluttering at the edge of the cliff.

She had reached the precipice at the same moment as her child. She had clutched at it, and gone over with it.

Ned heard a man shout below, and at the risk of his own life went down the cliff to the beach fifty yards further on. A moment later, and the boat came up to him with his wife and child in it. The baby was screaming; but her mother had entered eternal silence.

"They comed over like two mortal birds, and me not ten yards from the place they falled. A bit nearer, and, God's my Judge! they'd have falled in the boat and stove her in. And the li'l cheel dropped on deep water, and I grabbed her in a moment, and I don't think she's hurt, though her wits may be gone for ever; but the little woman—she comed on a rock on her back, and 'twas a terrible cruel scrunch, master. She'm dead, poor lamb, without a doubt."

A life, colourless to all save the man who loved her, was gone out; a small flower that few had ever turned to regard was broken off the stalk and destroyed. But with this uneventful, unregarded existence there passed the portion of another. Ned stood dazed, and many people came crowding down to the bay. When they reached him he had his wife in his arms, and his breast and chin were bathed in her blood.

This man once believed that the world had never known such joy as his; he once had thought that

none had ever felt such bliss; and now he supposed his sorrow the awfullest that had yet stricken man. He cried out, as countless young spirits have cried out down the ages in their hours of highest grief and joy, nor knew that at life's feast only the diners change, not the dishes.

CHAPTER VII

The blow that untimely chance had struck Ned Major was the more severe in that his short life had been so free of misfortune. At three-and-twenty a man is not tuned to suffer all that man can suffer. An age so tender offers some sort of shield against the full possibilities of human agony that face the adult. But so much the more, on one side, was his present woe augmented. He looked ahead into life, and felt that without Deborah it must prove an eternity of torment. He pictured perhaps threescore years dragged through without her, and, not knowing that memory is the plaything of time, believed he must go mad.

Tumbledown Dick, now crawling out his fag-end of ruined days, gave Ned better advice than any other man.

They met, and Varwell expressed grief and showed it.

"Nobody can say anything; nobody can do anything," he told Ned. "Don't think there's consolation in this world, or any other, for the fix you're in. Man be just as dumb and useless afore your plight as they were afore your poor wife's when she dropped over the cliff. But call home this, and I can say it better than some folk, since I'm at death's door myself and only waiting for him to open it. Remember that 'tis no great hardship for the happy to die like she died. Don't trouble about her. She's all right, and if there's a good time coming, she's there waiting; and if there's nought coming, then she's gone out like a candle, and with no more feeling. Whether or no, the dead be quite untroubled; so the

misery's only yours, and other men have had to go through as bad and worse. What you've got to do is to work like hell—work day and night—work till nature shuts your eyes and makes you sleep. And, when you waken, rise and work on. You're a Christian, ban't you? Well, now's the time to see what 'tis all worth, and what you really believe, and what you only thought you believed. Work—work—work, Ned. When a man's happy, then let him take a bit of holiday, and see the best life can show him; and when he's hit hip and thigh like you, then let him work. Work at anything—work at everything. Put yourself in the plough and pull it, and let the horse eat up the hedge. Work; and if you can get a pinch of peace out of prayer, then pray too, and go to sleep on your knees for weariness. But work's best. You've got to put time between you and this trouble, and nought makes time fly like work. That's one of the good reasons why I never did none. An idle man's life lasts twice as long as a busy one's. You ax a bee or a butterfly whose time slips away the quickest."

Dick talked and jested, and Ned suffered it, coming from him, and felt the better for hearing him. Instinct had already driven the bereaved spirit of the youth to toil, and toil, joining with time, presently brought a new psychologic train of impressions and revelations to Ned.

Anon, he became sick to weariness and loathing of work. He resented it, and found himself in revolt against it. For some days he desisted and roamed idle; then his thoughts became as giants to torture him, and he turned again to hard labour as the only anodyne. Thrice this happened, and with winter a spirit of extreme restlessness mastered him, so that he could not toil long at any one thing, but became desultory and irregular. Then he found himself hating the work that he had loved, and seeking labour of a different character.

He separated himself largely from his kind at this

season, and turned from his father and his sister to Nicholas Honeywill. It was a dumb, blood instinct that took him to the old farmer. He cared best to be with him because this man was the father of Deborah, and she had won from him some of her little ways. Grotesquely he glimpsed her in the man, and won a refinement of torture from accidental trifles that reminded him of his wife. His love took no shape of fuss and pother about her grave; he kept away from it. Neither did any cruel association of ideas alter his affection for his child. The little thing suffered slight evil from her fall and shock; and Ned spent much time with her, and spelled out daily in her face the writing of her mother. But she had nothing in common with Deborah, and promised to be cast in the Major mould of character and form.

His father's sturdy piety and faith made Ned's gorge rise for a season, and he avoided John Major. Lydia was more comfort to him, because she had sorrow to bear of her own, and the prosperity of her husband was embittered for her, and made of no account. Her pride in success and worldly advancement had perished. She was monogamous to the core of her heart, and she could ill endure to be less than all to Samuel. That his conduct towards her was always generous and loving, kind and chivalrous, did not condone his native instincts. They made them the more trying to bear.

Ned was a little troubled by this position, and even put his own chaotic outlook from his mind and strove with Brokenshire. But Samuel could not be influenced in this particular, and could not see that blame attached to him. He held himself an admirable husband and a good father. He contended that every hard-working man had a right to a measure of amusement, and that if his pleasure hurt nobody else, none had a right to criticise it. To the obvious retort that it hurt his wife, he replied that her point of view alone was to blame, not his conduct.

"If I'd been a Turk, or one of them Indian kings, I might have had a score of wives, and been as well thought upon as you," he said. "And I would have had," he added. "For why? because the older I live the more I see that God A'mighty never made nothing so interesting as females. They was the last thing He did make, and, as Tumbledown Dick said, 'twas natural they should be His masterpiece and crowning bit of cleverness."

Against this attitude the exhortations of Lydia's family beat in vain, and it remained only to see what Lydia herself would do about it. As for Titus, he refused to discuss the matter, and declared that such problems were quite outside his experience or power of criticism.

The situation dragged on without solution. Lydia hoped against hope; Ned, having spoken, turned in upon himself once more, and came gradually to a frame of mind wherein he could regard consciously and deliberately his own emotions from week to week. He found that he had good days and bad days. At times, such was his agony and hopeless torment, he seemed to be living again in the hours, now six months old, that followed Deborah's death. And sometimes there fell to him passages of broken peace, wherein grief beat only intermittent out of memory, like a seventh wave from the sea or a minute gun breaking woefully upon the wastes of night.

The change wrought in his whole outlook and disposition was immense; but it could only appear very gradually. Whether a catastrophe of profound character has power permanently to vitiate radical instincts and predilections, is unknown; whether terrific experiences can alter disposition; whether the clash of harsh environment may change human temperaments and cast a character into some mould that shall be enduring as well as novel—this may be doubted; but for the present, in the case of Ned Major, his sentiments suffered a transilience and upheaval wherein the old passions were smothered

and sunk deep, the old prejudices robbed of their former poignancy. He began to feel an earthquake of the mind; he grew more restless and more in sympathy with restless things. The solid land no longer spoke to him of its comfort and comeliness, its fertility and endurance; the sea no longer made him shudder as of old before its unconquerable spirit.

He found himself staring out over the water for hours together. To his own conscious amazement he discovered that the thing he hated in joy was hated no more now that joy had winged away for ever and sorrow was henceforth his portion. Indeed, the sad alone had power to draw him now; human griefs were the only matters that held him; the harrowed hearts or broken bodies of his kind alone drew him from the monotony of his own wounds.

On a day in late winter, when as yet the fallow was lifeless and the furrow brown, he looked out over the cliffs and fancied that the sea also was stricken with grief. His gentle mind, always tinged with sentimentality, now, in the days of misery, offered a fit theatre for pathetic fallacies. And he wove them here, while he stood and looked down at the grey bitterness of troubled waves driven by an east wind.

A strange experience overtook him in that hour, and, for the first time since his wife's death, he set out very resolutely to the scene of it. He descended the Cup and reached the edge; he retraced each frantic moment of the past, and saw, in the weeping eye of his mind, her sunbonnet caught fluttering aloft when she went down to death.

Below, sheltered from the wind, water lapped stone with a gentle susurration. The little waves cried of helplessness. Crestfallen they crept back from the rocks that spurned their embraces and tore their hearts out. These were the waves that had saved Deborah's baby; these were the rocks that had slain her. He speculated morbidly on the difference to him if Deborah had fallen in the deep water and her

child upon the stone. She might have been with him now, and the mound in the churchyard would have been smaller. Agony gripped him then, and he flung himself, face downward, on the cliff, unseen save by the sea-birds. They, too, entered into many a weary vigil. He remembered how, as children, he and Deborah had pretended to be their king and queen. A thousand, thousand times they had seen him and his wife together; and now the gulls were watching him alone—he who was never alone. Doubtless they wondered where the other part of him had gone to, and when it would come back again.

Then came spring, and he found the old songs thereof were changed. The waking earth and the wonder of it cried to him in vain. His heart was hard. He turned his back on the green veils of growing corn, for they spoke of gleaning; he felt poisonous trickles of hardness and cruelty run with his blood. There rose great trouble from the sea, and two boats had been lost in the rage of vernal equinox. He read the details, measured the sorrow of two homes, and found that it fell far short of his own. But daily he looked on the sea with deeper interest and an altered spirit. It could strike back as well as suffer; it was not always conquered by the cliffs or ground under the keels of the ships. He recalled his youthful attitude, and wondered what mad thing had overtaken his soul to change it so. Every day he expected to waken and find that he hated the sea as of yore; but the old fear and detestation returned not. Instead, he grew to feel a sort of kinship with it —a fraternity of hunger and unrest, of woe and secret yearning to strike back.

He told himself that the sea might understand him; he dreamed that the sea might even soothe him out of her own misery; but the prosperous and jocund earth neither knew nor cared. The wail of the sea-mew was closer to his heart than the song of the lark or the happy throbbing of the thrush; the spume, that flew cliff-high on a March gale, held more subtle

consolation in its quivering torment than the budding snow on the blackthorn or the first primrose in the lane. These things were for ever a part of his precious one; and, for him, they were indeed as dead as the girl in her grave; but the sea did not claim her, the sea had not slain her. It was possible to brood upon the water without remembering Deborah or the natural things that she had joyed in.

The man could not at first credit his own strange revulsion of soul in this matter, and he hid it from others. His father's love of the sea and Honeywill's hatred of it alike found him impassive before them. Now he neither differed from the first nor agreed with the second. He was very silent at this season, and kept much alone with his work in the open air. Children had more power to please him than any adult. He saw Lydia's family, and shared his father's special love of the boy Johnny.

There was coming a day now, three months hence, when Johnny would go to sea, and John Major awaited this great event with a fervour and anticipation as keen as his grandson's; but, like all who loved Ned, his days had been clouded before his son's sorrow.

It was a question what Ned would do, and he seemed incapable of deciding. His father-in-law desired him to stay at Berry Farm; but he disliked the thought. The sea now beckoned him to bide within sight and sound of it; while other forces drew him strongly off from the stage of his life's tragedy.

So he endured, and time hastened with him. Years instead of months seemed to be piled upon his bent head until women declared that it was terrible to mark a youth thus age under their eyes, and men—the thing put before them—perceived its truth, and also grieved. As yet were manifest only the sad signs of his experience; the result would take longer to ripen, and longer to render its account.

So life broke in Ned Major, and, after the manner of life, gave what was precious in exchange for what

was also precious. To learn is also to lose; and whether the thing gained is better than the thing lost, who shall declare for another? And whether the rapture of youth is the true wine of life, and manhood's grey awakening only the dregs of it, who shall determine?

CHAPTER VIII

With passage of time the subtle seeds sowed by tribulation in young Major's spirit began to bear fruit; and as he gathered up his forces at the inevitable call of life, he discovered that old interests were weakened to death and new ideas now reigned in their stead. The sea had delivered its first message to him without avail. His youthful soul loved the land, and the things that belonged to his father's life repelled and even appalled him. But now, after this master blow, a new atmosphere seemed to envelop Ned's spirit, and the earth, together with the labours of the earth, suffered a mighty declension in his regard. This abatement was not gradual, it came harshly and abruptly; but, buried in his agricultural routine, week by week and month by month, the young man did not immediately perceive it. For some time he failed to realise so improbable a revulsion. Then he found it out and perceived that it must be reckoned with. More than once he put the claim aside as a thing too fantastic and unreal to regard; more than once he strove to slight this strange metamorphosis of every instinct and passion, as some freak, bred of great sorrow and destined surely to pass away with flux of time. But it would not pass; instead it gathered strength, and grew, and forced itself strenuously upon him. It cried out of the briny air and called from the wave-beat on the cliff; it shook his casement window when the wind blew by night, and by day, in letters of fire or foam, shone out upon the sunlit spaces of the sea.

He might not thrust it away, nor did he long wish to do so. Since it would not depart, he received it and accepted it, as of the cup that he must drink.

He hearkened to the sea's second message, and out of his restless misery awakened a birth of desires antagonistic to all that he believed radical within him. The leading principle of his being had apparently perished with the light of his being, and died when Deborah died. He made no haste, but let the new-fledged spirit win its way. He waited and watched himself, and sometimes the call of the water grew faint and far off, and he fancied that it was dying, as green grief turned grey and a measure of fitful rest sometimes brooded on his soul; but then, with renewed force, awoke the trumpet and rolled the beckoning wave. And with this strange coaction of the element that he had once abhorred, there waned in him his old ardour for the soil. It seemed, when the precious little piece of earth that he had loved was restored to the Mother, all earth changed vitally. His broken soul found earth no longer constant, and turned therefrom to the shifting and unstable kingdoms of the sea. They promised nothing, and pretended to offer no sure foothold or abiding place for man. The sea was honest; the earth had betrayed him. And his torn heart bent steadily toward the misery of the waters; cried with a newborn instinct for their companionship; trusted that from them, in their power and their powerlessness, might some patience and return to peace be won again.

He hesitated long, and it was to Dick Varwell that he first explained the transformation of his spirit.

The tramp had succumbed, and was gone into hospital to die there. He sent for Ned and the young man went to see him.

"Times be changed since we used to sit on the green side and tell all the wisdom that we'd gathered up," whispered fading Dick. "I've tumbled down for good and all now, Ned, and all the king's hosses and all Munday's bottles won't set me up again. I shall only tumble down once more, old chap, and that is off this here wonderful bed into my pit. The

luxuries of this place! I'm awful sorry I didn't give 'em a call long ago. And the kind hearts here! 'Tis a most remarkable affair, and, Lord knows, I give 'em a lot of trouble, but they make nought of it, and nobody appears to wish to hasten my going by an hour. There's a masterpiece of a nurse what looks after me. A grand wife wasted is that woman."

"I hope there's a chance for you yet, Dick," said Ned.

"Not half a chance, or I wouldn't be here. They don't deal in incurables as a rule, but they be making an exception in my favour. I've promised I shan't be long. But the kindness in the world—the kindness and humanity that one never knows be lurking in it! And I pay 'em with laughter. Anybody can make a man laugh, but it takes something to make a woman. However, I've done it. They are all the better for a bit of fun, for there's not much of it going on here; and there's nought like seeing the world through strange spectacles sometimes."

He talked intermittently, and wandered in his speech. He spoke of his past, and uttered thoughts broken out from the silent web of their context in his mind. Ned listened, and said little until Varwell was weary.

"Ah! if we but saw what the trawl sees! Why, then our mouths would water—yes—and sometimes our hair would stand on end. Awful things on the floor of the ocean without a doubt—all the graveless dead, for instance. I wish they'd dump me there to join 'em. A pleasant company of bones, Ned. We'd soon rub up a friendship, I promise you! But in a pit all by oneself? A lonely thought—eh?"

The listener was interested.

"I've felt terrible kind to the sea again since my trouble, Dick."

"And why for not? 'Tis the way of nature to fly from what smites it. The solid land's hit you; so you turn from it; and the unsolid sea have broken many a widow and orphan, so they cuss it. 'Tis the

point of view. Now I've got no quarrel with any of the elements—not one. They've all been good to me after their kind—even water."

Presently he spoke again.

"No, by God! and I won't blame myself either; I won't be so damned mean at the end as to turn round on 'Tumbledown Dick' and call him my worst enemy. I've been a worthless, useless piece of goods; and I've lived a blackguard's life; and I've enjoyed it something wonderful. *Lord! how I have enjoyed it!* I don't much want it to come back, mind you, because nought that tasted good once ever reaches quite up to the same flavour twice; but if I had to go through it all again, I'd wish for nothing better—nothing better or more interesting or spicy in its way. I'd even have the Justices of the Peace just the same. I should miss 'em and their well-meant babble—poor, bumbling, pudding-headed things. 'Twas part of the fun of the fair—the Bench and the mummies rigged up on it."

He stopped, and Ned was going to speak, but found no words.

"And now the fun of the fair's over, and the lights be turned out for me, and the music done, and the last pipe smoked, Ned, and the last square drink drunk. They'll paint my lips with brandy on a feather presently—at the finish. A dying man can't drink more than a babby can. 'Tis a pity that, and seems about the saddest side of death I can picture. I only quarrel with them on the subject of liquor here. Soup! what's soup to me?"

"I believe you've got a lot of life in you yet, Dick."

Varwell shook his head and kept silence. Then Ned Major found something to say.

"I'd like to know if the Chrisitan faith have come to mean more to you of late. I don't ask out of no rude curiosity, Richard; but 'tis terrible interesting to learn how anything wears at a great pinch, and I was wondering how much it had done to help me through the awful trouble I've had; and then I fell

to wondering if it had catched hold of you at all, now you're on your beam ends."

"No doubt your father was in great form when your poor girl broke her back?"

"Yes, he was. I think I might have got a deal more consolation out of religion if my dear father had gone a bit lighter on it."

"'Twas a rare chance for Holy John, and I can hear him talking. Parson have been terrible busy at me too. What with him and the bluebottles—— But they all mean well—men and flies—and such poor, brainless things can't be made to understand that you'd rather they kept away. No doubt your parent thinks that 'twas the loving, watching Lord took your wife over the cliff; no doubt he's told you 'tis the same Almighty Party makes my dear friend Brokenshire so large-hearted over the girls; and no doubt he thinks that my days was all planned for me and my luck arranged by the Old Gentleman he prays his prayers to. Perhaps so; only I can't see it. I shook up parson but yesterday. I told him what I'll tell you, Ned; and 'tis this: Christianity be like Free Trade—a very fine thing if us all played at it in earnest; but as only a handful do and all the rest do not, then you see what a mess of a place the world is, and you find the truest Christians—like the truest Free Traders—being left farthest behind. What we call Christianity is all ugly make-believe nowadays —all trying to hunt with the hounds and run with the hare. A prosperous Christian is bunkum, for not one of 'em have any more right to be prosperous than Christ Hisself was; and if a man's well up in the world, and if a nation be on top, then you may bet your boots that 'twasn't Christianity put 'em there, but cash, or cannon, or brains, or luck—anything but the stark teaching of the Lord. And if a nation yelps to a God of Battles, and bleats parson's stuff and sings hymns when it launches its fighting ships, and gives God the praise when it cuts another nation's throat, and so on—then you can swear that nation's

fooling itself and its people; and them that run that nation know it very well too. Christianity be nearly so dead as I am—dead-alive, you might say, same as me. They be flinging half they did ought to stick to overboard—to lighten the ship; but do as they will, it can't float much longer. The pumps are choked. I told chaplain these things, and he said 'twas a pity I allowed myself to think in such an unlawful manner at my latter end. 'Christianity's gone,' I said to him, 'and there's nought but imitations in the market; and folk—parsons included—be so ignorant of the real thing nowadays that they think the imitations are genuine.' He got niffy then, and answered 'twasn't for me to argue with him. And he hoped my eyes would be open afore they were shut—poor young man! He never had taken a drop of liquor in his life, and he never had smoked a shred of baccy; and he wouldn't believe it when I told him I used to puff my cigarette between drinks afore I was weaned."

"Lydia's more comfort to me in a way than father," said Ned, after a pause.

"And Samuel's more comfort to me than doctor. We both run on our own affairs, you and me, Ned. That's the way with wretched men. All you care about for the minute be dead, and all I ever did care about be going to die; so 'tis natural that us should both be a bit down in the mouth. But we'll put out to sea together. I'll go with the tide, and so will you; and my voyage be to peace and silence, beyond thirst or hunger or warmth or laughter; and yours—Lord knows where 'twill take you. Into the 'Jack and Lydia' for a start, I suppose. What does the old man say?"

"I've told none yet. I've only hinted of the thing to Lydia. 'Tis known that I give up at Berry Farm; but my father thinks I'm going to take another small place somewhere; and so does Nicholas Honeywill."

"Tell John Major that you want to go back in his boat. Tell him that, and then come and tell me how

he takes it. I'd dearly like to hear of the large joy of that man when you break the news. He've got the real thing, he have—the right down, earthquake faith that moves mountains and—what's harder—men's hearts. And if you was to do that and go to sea along with him, 'twould whitewash God properly—at any rate in one man's eyes. Not that Major ever doubted anything that happened wasn't the best and properest that could happen. You tell him, Ned; and come and tell me what he says, for I'd like to hear it."

Mr. Varwell's conversation was cut short and Ned departed. But he did as Dick advised, for his mind had already determined upon the step, and during the following Sunday young Major visited his father and declared the thing his spirit yearned to do.

"I suppose you'll say 'tis put into me by God, not by grief and restless, hopeless misery," he said. "I don't know as to that. I only know that 'tis nearly a year now since my Deborah went, and I'm no better than I was the day after. And somehow, the sight of the sea be the one thing that makes me bear up with my life, father; and I've got gradually to think that the thing I hated may be the only cure now. I've felt a strange, growing wish to be out on it, tossed by it, driven afore it, tumbled and stricken by it—drowned by it if need be. I want to go back. I must go back—in your boat, if you'll have it so; and if not, in another."

The deeps of the older man were shaken, and he doubted. His son spoke again of the desires that had now dominated him; and presently, from a fleeting shadow of fear that this was some mental disaster in Ned, the father ascended on strong pinions of his faith and believed. Light beamed upon him; to his eyes this thing appeared as a wonder planned from creation by the Maker of earth and sea. For Ned he mourned not at all. He did not waste a word of commiseration upon his son; he did not remotely fathom the long-drawn mental torments from which this negation of principles and instincts had been born.

"It is the Lord's doing!" he cried; "but it is not marvellous in my eyes, Ned, because what happens is the seemly, proper, planned thing—always and every time; and it never can be marvellous to the eye of faith. I accept it. Your berth will be waiting for you this day month."

John Major was very quiet then. He said little more, and felt glad when his son left him; but his fervour reached a wonderful height in secret. For long hours he knelt and thanked the Lord that He had remembered His servant. At no time did he spend a sigh upon Ned. He rejoiced on his own account, and there was not a corner in his mind for any suspicion that the thing to happen could be other than very good. That this birth had been torn from a matrix of awful ill-fortune, from bitter griefs and from heartshaking sorrows, he did but partly recognise. He saw it, rather as a deed predestined for his son's justification and eternal welfare. Therefore he received it with deep religious joy. He never wondered why it had come about; he only marvelled that God was pleased so mightily to bless him and crown his white hairs with this unutterable boon.

From John's standpoint the propriety and seemliness of such a progression were absolute. William Gilberd called to visit him during the evening of this day, and Mr. Major explained the inevitable fitness of the thing that Ned was doing.

"Earth be a haven to him no more: the sea's his haven henceforrard. 'Twas always planned so, and intended so, but he couldn't understand, and the Lord was forced to make it plain. All has changed, William, and the voice of the sea that frightened his childhood, calls to his manhood now. Life has altered the meaning of earth and sea to my Ned. Spirit to spirit he comes back to the water, because he'm grown restless, like the sea, and 'tis the only thing that can give him peace, and 'tis the only thing that his Maker ever meant to give him peace."

"Such affairs be a mystery, no doubt; but the

world's full of 'em, and the sea's fuller still," declared Gilberd. "And so Paul Larkin will have to find a job in another boat; and that'll be a troublesome mystery to him, for certain, because he thought that he was good for years along with us."

"There's no puzzle in nothing at all," answered John Major. "Mystery, as you call it, be only a veil drawn between human life and faith in the Almighty. Trust him and the sky's always clear. Sometimes, fishing, us can't behold the earth or sea for fog, William; but you'll find 'tis often blue overhead if you only look that way."

"And now you and your son and your grandson will all be sailing in one boat—a thing as looked far beyond any earthly power to bring about. Three generations together! Ban't that a mystery, John?"

"No, William; a wonderful act of the watching, loving God—that's all. Nothing to His power, but amazing in our eyes, though it didn't ought to amaze us. 'Twas written in the Book from the first; and now our lives have come to that page, and 'tis there, turned over for us to read."

"You'll be gay and proud about it, I reckon. It means a deuce of a lot to you?"

Upon that aspect the elder could not speak. He held up his hand and shook his head. Then he put his hand over his eyes, and soon a tear rolled down from under it.

CHAPTER IX

Smoke from many chimneys reddened beneath a setting sun, and Brixham lay, mellowed to beauty, in the roseal evening hour. Boats were passing out from the harbour on the tide. They sailed from the deep shore shadows, they took the light upon their sails and glowed all russet and tawny.

Ned Major came along the quay with his father, descended a flight of steps and entered the dinghy that waited for them. Gilberd and the boy, Johnny, rowed, and soon Ned found himself approaching the 'Jack and Lydia,' where she tugged at her moorings in the running tide. Seaward a fine trawling breeze blew, and sunset colours rained in red gold over the fretted water.

Ned marked the old familiar names as he came again among the fishing-boats. Here were the 'Pilgrim' and the 'Bread Winner,' the 'Provider' and the 'Smiling Morn,' the 'Alpha,' the 'Ocean's Gift,' the 'Silver Spray,' the 'True Vine.' These craft and the names of them now uttered a harmony upon one man's heart, and Ned appreciated something of the spirit that had inspired their sponsors. The 'Night Hawk' got to sea ten minutes before them. She belonged to Trust and Mutter now, and Brokenshire was interested in her no more.

Then John Major and his son and his grandson sailed out together. The old man found it hard to preserve self-restraint. Only when a strong easterly breeze freshened at nightfall did the business of the boat distract him.

Berry Head died away and land was lost to sight. After dark the trawl went overboard and Ned lived again through the old sensations and experiences.

One by one the sounds and sights and smells came back to him, and came close. It seemed impossible that more than ten years separated him from his last voyage. Nothing was altered but his stature and his soul. He kept aloof a little, and neither his father nor Gilberd thrust themselves upon him. Johnny had been in the boat a month, and his grandfather declared him equal to any brace of ordinary boys.

After the trawl was shot, Ned went forward and sat alone, with his spirit bare to the sea, that her salt sting might touch his wounds and torment them to healing.

He ate of the hot supper presently, and was cheerful and content. He did not fail to see his father's subdued exaltation, and felt glad that an old man could be so happy. Johnny chattered and essayed to teach Ned his business. The youthful mind but partially understood that his uncle had worked in the 'Jack and Lydia' before he was born. The trawler had shifted her winter sails when last in harbour, and was now under her larger summer canvas. It needed some shortening.

John Major and his son took the morning watch, and after the trawl had been drawn and shot again, they turned in while Gilberd and the boy kept the deck.

His highest hopes and longings satisfied, the elder first prayed, then stretched upon his bunk and heaved a great sigh that echoed the sigh of the sea at his ear. Absolute contentment was in the sound of it. He said a few words to Ned, and felt glad when his son prayed also. To be thus brought into the intimacy of the past—to see Ned upon his knees beside him—consummated the old man's happiness. There was no room in his heart for one sad thought.

He slept soon and spoke in his sleep. He laughed and turned, and Ned heard broken fragments from the exulting psalm that his father loved.

"'He hath done marvellous things: his right hand and his holy arm hath gotten him the victory. . . .

Let the floods clap their hands. . . . Let the sea roar. . . .'"

The younger could not sleep. He rose, therefore, went on deck, and told Johnny to turn in. The boy at first refused, but quickly realised that here was one who must be obeyed. He was ordered to go below, and vanished in some surprise, for discipline from his uncle he had not expected or tasted until now.

Gilberd was at the helm, and spoke of the weather. Ned made some vague remark of no purpose, then went forward to watch the glimmer that roams a nightly sea and hear the mournful sounds that come up thereform. Was this great change in his life to do the thing he hoped? Would peace return to him presently as the result of it? He felt less certain now than he had felt before he overturned his life and came back to his father. To-night his mind misgave him.

A great steamer passed, and the watcher knew that perhaps five hundred souls were sleeping on her. Her wash was heavier than the running sea, and he felt his father's boat rise upon it. The steamer dropped into the darkness so suddenly that but for the thud of her propellers and the hiss of her wake she might have been thought to founder.

The man considered his sister and her children and her troubles. Then he brooded upon his own child.

He felt the night's cold breath begin to chill him, therefore he rose and walked up and down the narrow deck. Gilberd thought that Ned had turned for companionship and spoke again.

"What do 'e make of it, my son?" he asked. "I'll lay my life now you'm all in a miz-maze—just at first?"

"No, William—not with the boat. It comes back very natural and clear to me. 'Tis more real, you might say, than—than a lot that's happened since. I'm only wondering——"

"Wondering if ever you'll be able to bide at it?"

"I shall bide."

"Did you hear tell that Tumbledown Dick died last Sunday evening?"

"I was along with him. Saw him through it."

"Did he say anything to catch hold of? Now and again, at the last gasp, Ned, a man will tell out a good useful thing, as if he'd already picked up the lights of the land he was bound for and had the pilot aboard. Though, of course, us have no right to say ezacally what sort of lights that poor chap picked up. Did he speak?"

"He said nought."

Presently Ned Major went forward and stood in the bows. At turn of tide an old moon rose and cast some light into the margins of the cloudbanks; but she was soon swallowed up. The morning watch had come, and already, along the ridges of the sea, there trembled a first, faint shudder of to-morrow.

THE END

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